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ABSTRACT

This book offers guidelines, strategies, and advice for both teachers and parents on improving parent-teacher partnerships. The following topics are discussed: (1) setting goals for parent involvement; (2) communicating with parents; (3) organizing and scheduling techniques for teachers and parents; (4) homework--a teacher, student, parent cooperative plan; (5) integrating the school into the community and involving parents in the schools; (6) resources for teachers and parents; and (7) developing partnerships with parents with special needs. (JD)

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Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook

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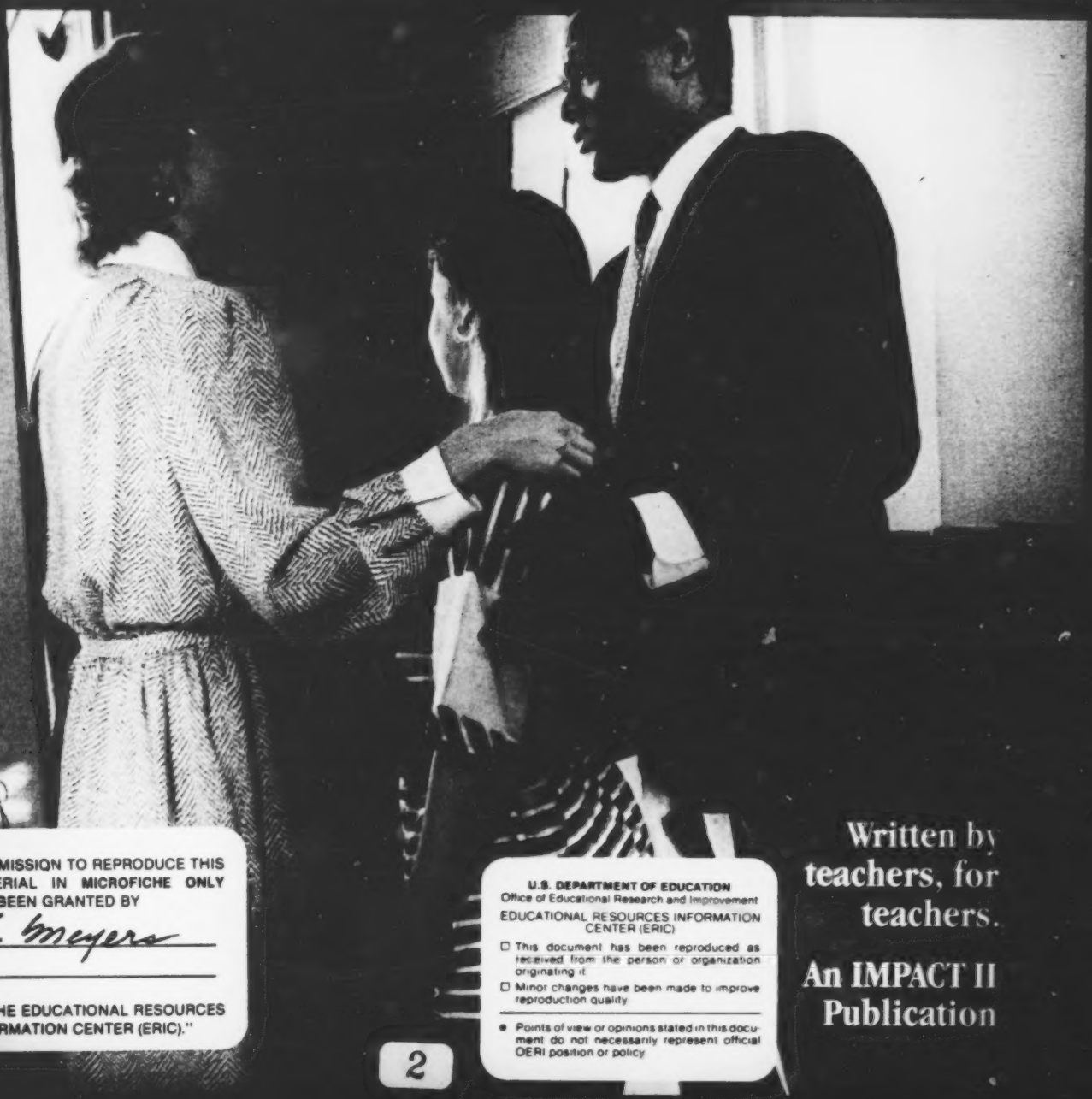

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Written by teachers, for teachers.

An IMPACT II Publication

Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook

FIRST EDITION

Written for teachers by teachers:

Kate Arleen Bressler
Sheila Clapkin
Miriam K. Cohen
Jan Cox Corbett
Patricia A. Crowley
Marilyn L. Dixon
Mary Anne Drew
Barbara Ann Carter Ellis
Susan Feldman
Joel Howard Finkel
Robyn Forman
Philip T. Freemer
Timothy P. Gangwer
David Rudolph Georgi
Tim Hardin
Margo Harris
Paula Hartman
Charlotte Higuchi
Deborah Hoadies
Carol P. Jacobs
Rochelle S. Kaplan
Violet Kary
Sharon Garrity Larkin
Beth Larkins
Barbara Longmire
Eileen Luckner
Kerri A. Lyons
Barbara K. Mabry
Judith Menken
Jacqueline Meyer
Shirley M. Myles
Paul James Nicolardi
Bernadine C. Orintas
Kathryn Pepe
Sharon M. Pike
Jeanne Poland
Billie Preston
Marie A. Prisco
Elizabeth Rainn
Rose C. Reissman
Dorothy Ricci
Darlissa Pivola-Ritter
Lenore Roseman
Robert Sarnoff
Steven Schneider
Carol Simiele
Beth Smuckler
Marylin Kurlan Sperling
Donna Regina Strand
Leslie J. Sussman
Doris E. Tariska
Mary Villani
Nina Wasserman
Ann Wilbourn
Dortha Cool Willetts
Brian Withers

Advisory Committee:

William Cirone
Ramon C. Cortines
Sanford M. Dornbusch
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Charlotte Frank
Mary Hatwood Futrell
Richard R. Johnson
Beth Larkins
Donald St. John Parsons
Albert Shanker
Joseph Shenker
Robert R. Spillane

Editor-in-Chief: Ellen Meyers
Editor: Ellen Hyman
Associate Editor: Marie Bobetsky
Production Coordinator: Rafael Ortiz
Production Assistant: Judy Maiorana

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P.O. Box 577
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(212) 966-5582

Ellen Dempsey, *Executive Director*

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Corporate Message

NYNEX Foundation is pleased to have supported IMPACT II in its compilation and national distribution of the ***Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook***. The work is unique in that a major part of the information it contains has been contributed by teachers — an often overlooked resource.

The handbook's goal is to provide guidance to teachers and parents, in order to encourage more parents to become involved in their children's education through creative school partnerships with the children's teachers.

The handbook, with its emphasis on partnerships, is a natural fit with NYNEX Foundation's contributions focus, since the Foundation similarly seeks to foster and build partnerships for understanding and progress through a carefully considered funding program.

NYNEX Foundation has as its principal priority improving the quality of education, especially where children at risk are concerned. We believe that this publication will ultimately benefit many of our nation's children, and we commend and thank IMPACT II for the excellent work it has done in putting the handbook together.

William G. Burns
President
NYNEX Foundation

Introduction

This book is in response to a cry for help from both teachers and parents. That cry came across at full volume when, for the first time, teachers and parents were polled simultaneously on their attitudes toward education and learning. Pollster Louis Harris found that parents are eager to be consulted about children's learning and that teachers are open to the involvement of parents in the process of education. However, major obstacles, such as mismatched schedules, inhibit collaboration. A majority of teachers reported that they are reluctant to approach parents to discuss their children. One-fifth of the parents reported the same reluctance.

The gap between home and school was also documented by a survey of teachers recently conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Ninety percent of teachers polled said that lack of parental support is a problem in their schools.

As the job of parenting becomes more complicated (over half the families in this country have two working parents) and as the world becomes a harsher place for many children (20% of this nation's children live in poverty), the demands on teachers grow. But . . . what parents want has to be tempered by what teachers can do.

What follows are some guidelines, strategies, and advice that teachers offer to their colleagues across the country as to what teachers can do. Based on our philosophy that it is necessary for teachers and parents to work together, we have provided many concrete suggestions, practical ideas, and model projects. We have also included a unique sampling of letters because IMPACT II teachers believe that communication is the most important means of building successful partnerships. It is our hope that this handbook will aid you in one of your most formidable — and increasingly important — tasks: building teacher/parent partnerships.

What is IMPACT II?

IMPACT II was established in 1979 to recognize and reward creative teachers, and to improve classroom instruction through teacher networking. Small grants are awarded to teachers who have developed successful programs and to teachers who wish to "take an idea and go creative." By joining IMPACT II networks, teachers disseminate good program ideas through workshops, interschool visits, and annual catalogs; form collegial relationships; and are encouraged to enhance their professionalism.

IMPACT II, which began as a pilot program in New York City and Houston, Texas, is now operating in such diverse places as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara County, California; Washington, D.C.; the State of Connecticut; Westchester County and Rockland County, New York; Fairfax County, Virginia; Boston, Massachusetts; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. (For a full site listing, please turn to page 62.) On the local level, IMPACT II is funded by school districts and local foundations and corporations.

IMPACT II
THE TEACHERS NETWORK

1 Setting Goals for Parent Involvement

An Open Letter to My Child's Teacher and to All Teachers Everywhere

You and I are partners in one of the most crucial endeavors any human being can undertake; always challenging, sometimes frustrating, potentially rewarding in ways that defy measurement and exceed expectation: the education of a child. It is in partnership with one another that we can best do this job, and it is only by establishing and maintaining a dialogue that we can act as partners.

One of the first things that you can do to begin working together with me and the parents of your other students is to join your school's Parent-Teacher Association at the beginning of each school year. Encourage your colleagues to join as well. Be aware of and support PTA events, and attend meetings whenever possible. The PTA can put you in touch with your school's most active, committed parents, those who will go on trips with you and your class, even though their child is not in them, and who will help you out in other ways. If you feel there is a way they might help you, don't hesitate to ask.

As important as awareness of and involvement in the PTA is, it is even more vital to develop relationships with individual parents. Of course, this can be done during Open School Week and at teacher-parent conferences. But take advantage of other, less formal opportunities to become acquainted with parents. Some parents drop off and pick up their children every day, and you can use these times, however brief, to establish a relationship. For those parents who work or whom you don't see daily for whatever reason, written notes back and forth can be a useful means of communication.

There is one particularly important request I must make of you. If you are having a problem of any kind with my child, whether it's in the area of academic performance, attitude, or behavior, PLEASE DON'T WAIT until conference or report-card time to tell me about it. Tell me when you see me, write a note or make a phone call, but however you do it, let me know as soon as possible, so that together we can tackle the problem before it gets any worse. I don't mind waiting to hear positive things about my child, but please let's discuss the negatives as they happen.

There are many obstacles in the way of our having an effective partnership. There may be so many children in your class that it's difficult for you to give my child and every other child the individual attention they need and deserve. There may be disruptive children in your class who are not getting help from an overworked guidance counselor. You may be burdened with excessive paperwork and bureaucratic red tape that takes up time during which you could be teaching. You may be held back from using innovative and creative teaching methods by supervisors and administrators who are less than responsive to your needs and those of your students.

Of course, we can each work separately to remove these obstacles. But let's pledge to join together to fight for reduced class size, increased guidance services, more school aides, and some voice in the selection of supervisory personnel. Let's also fight for clean schools, safe schools, modern textbooks, and ample teaching material in every school, not just the wealthy ones. Another area where we can join forces is in the evaluation and election of community school board members, the folks who have the power to see that some of these changes take place.

The task before us seems enormous. Positive changes take time to come about, and the children keep on growing. But I promise you that I will make every effort at home to reinforce and supplement what you teach my child in the classroom. I also pledge to do all I can as a parent and a citizen to make our schools better for their most vital component, you, the teacher. Together we can make our children ready for the future that will be theirs.

Sincerely,

Ms. Joanne Marks

Ms. Joanne Marks

"Parents play roles of inestimable importance in laying the foundation for learning to read. A parent is a child's first tutor in unraveling the fascinating puzzle of written language. A parent is a child's one enduring source of faith that somehow, sooner or later, he or she will become a good reader."

Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading, 1985.

As teachers we take pride in seeing our children become successful, enthusiastic students. We congratulate ourselves for doing a good job. Often, we forget that we are not the only influences on the children in our classrooms. Too often we forget one all-important ingredient — the parent of the student. Research indicates that parents, more often than not, are the key ingredient to a child's success. Parental support is a vital factor in any successful program.

Parents need to be involved in schools because they are a child's first teachers, and being parents they will continue to teach throughout every phase of that child's life. Parents who understand the developmental stages of growth are better prepared to accept the highs and lows of parenting. Most parents are more than willing to become involved, but it is up to you to contact them.

"Teacher contacts with parents need to begin on a positive note. As a beginning, single teacher, my attitude was if they (the parents) couldn't do it, how could they expect me to do it? Parenting and school contacts taught me a great deal about parental involvement and the need for a positive approach.

"My first two sons went off to school. The only contact I had with the school was at report-card time and parent conference days. Then came son number three. From day one, I had all kinds of school contacts, frequently under the guise of wanting to involve me in my child's education. All the notes and phone calls started with 'Jay did or didn't. . .. Please make him. . ..' I dreaded the ringing phone and eventually the notes stopped making it home. It wasn't until Mr. Smith, a good-humored assistant high school principal, and Ms. Markham, a wonderful creative writing teacher, contacted me that I began to believe that there were those who truly wanted to help my son, utilizing my knowledge of him as well as their expertise. Mr. Smith would call and begin the conversation with 'Hi. Guess who?' He would then ask what I felt we should do while outlining school policy.

"The creative writing teacher contacted me after hearing one of Jay's 'marvelous' excuses. After discussing Jay with Mr. Smith, her remark was, 'Anyone who can tell such creative stories should be a writer.' Thus began my son's salvation. Ms. Markham called every four to six weeks whether there was a problem or not. Strangely enough, in her class, Jay had relatively few problems. She shared insights gained in class and through her conversations with Jay's other teachers. As home and school truly worked together, problems diminished and a student was born."

Just as teachers are striving for the right to be decision makers and have a say in the way schools are run, parents also want to be a part of some of that decision making. When parents and teachers set goals and make decisions together, teachers, parents, and children benefit.

Parent contact needs to begin on Day One of the school year — or better yet, before the school year begins. A simple letter, introducing yourself as the child's teacher, listing rules and consequences for your class, making general suggestions for helping the child at home, and noting times you can be conveniently reached during the school day, sets a positive tone for the year. Contact should be continued at frequent intervals during the year, preferably when you have something positive to say about the child. Contact parents through notes and phone calls as often as possible. Then, when a negative does occur, the parent is more willing to help and does not feel as threatened. Communication is essential. The parent may have insights that will be invaluable to you.

The First Letter Home

It is necessary to make yourself "known" to the parents from DAY ONE in September. A suggestion for the first day of school is to send home a comprehensive letter to the parents that:

1. Greets the parents.
2. Lists the supplies their child will need.
3. Explains your system for assigning and collecting work.
4. Asks for any money needed to purchase items to be used during the year by the children.
5. Has attached to it (with an explanation in the letter) all necessary

forms that must be returned to the school.

6. Includes a list of all special classes for the week (including day/time).
7. Has a copy of a weekly report with an explanation of what it will cover.
8. Closes with an open invitation to the parents to call you any time they deem it necessary.

This packet is a true "ice-breaker." Parents will know you a little, and they will be fully aware of your expectations for the school year and for their child.

What Do Parents Want?

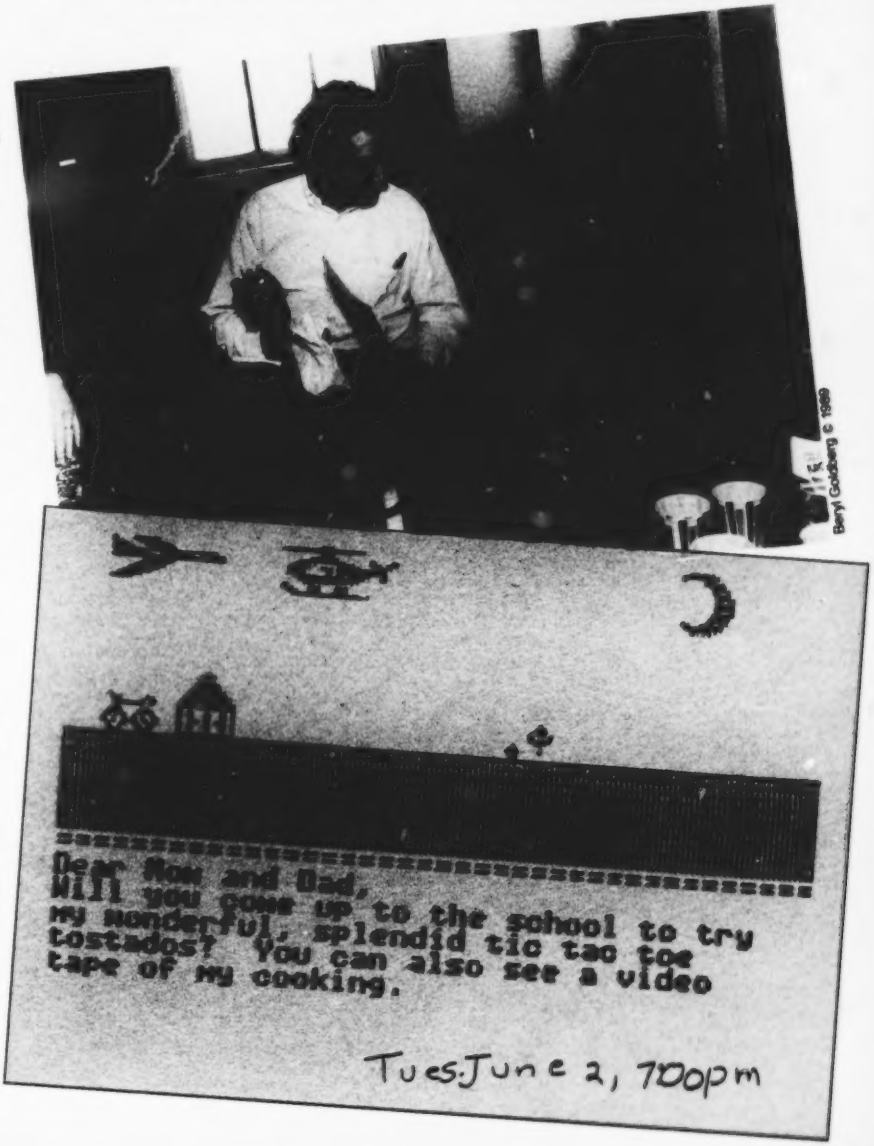
Parents see teachers as the trained professionals. Just as doctors, lawyers, and dentists don't ask their clients to do their professional jobs, teachers should not ask parents to carry out their professional duties. Rather, they should give the parents assistance, ideas, and concrete suggestions for helping the child at home and at school. These suggestions should be relevant and helpful to all students, not just those having difficulty.

"Discussions at my school (and countless others) revealed the general feeling that parents were aware of the lack of collaboration between teachers and parents but were unable to affect the necessary and desired change. Our parents noted that their PTA meetings and functions were marked by poor attendance, but agreed that the regularly scheduled teacher-parent conferences, held twice a year, were marked by record numbers. As a result of those discussions, the following needs were indicated by the parents:"

1. Parents would prefer an involvement with school that centers around the curriculum needs of their children.
2. Parents would be interested in attending meetings and workshops that instruct them in assisting their child in learning at home.
3. Parents would appreciate a sense of being welcome during the school day. This sense would be furthered by the creation of a special room in the building in which parents could meet and discuss common concerns, while accompanied by a younger child if necessary.
4. Parents feel a need for a more ongoing type of dialogue between themselves, teachers, and the administration.
5. Parents would like to be included in such activities as accompanying the class on trips and assisting in the classroom, in the lunchroom, during fundraising, and in other situations that involve the need for an adult.

Here are some of the ways you can encourage parents to become involved:

- Work together with your colleagues and administrators to develop an educational philosophy for your school which is within state and local mandates. Meet together to find ways of implementing your philosophy. Involve the parents in some of the strategies.
- Set realistic goals. Enlist the help of parents to reach them.
- Give parents choices within the structures of the school and inform them of their rights.


Beryl Goldberg © 1989
Dear Mom and Dad,
Will you come up to the school to try
my wonderful, splendid tic tac toe
tostados? You can also see a video
tape of my cooking.
Tues. June 2, 7:00pm

- Provide opportunities for teachers and parents to learn more about parenting skills.
- Treat parents as partners. Be sensitive to their needs.
- Be resources for parents.
- Provide opportunities for parents and teachers to get to know each other as human beings.
- Be strong advocates for children and encourage parents to do the same.
- Provide the services that parents need.
- Listen to parents. Be available.
- Help parents to understand how children learn.
- Be a learner yourself.

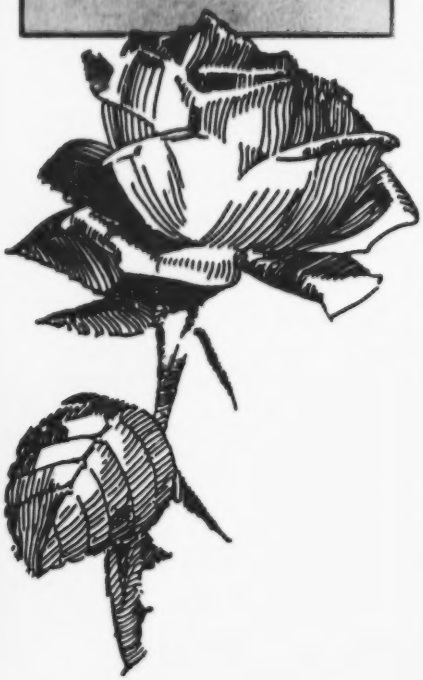
It is also helpful to have a handout available that contains suggestions for how the parent can help the child at home. These suggestions should not require the parent to assume the role of teacher. Also, they should be ideas and concrete suggestions that are relevant to all students.

"Each month I send a letter to the parents of my students telling them what the class is focusing on that month. With the letter, I enclose a list of suggested activities for at-home projects. The following is an example:"

MAY HOME ACTIVITIES

What's Happening in May?
Mother's Day
Memorial Day
How Many Ways, a game
Nutrition Unit

Supplies for May
Marshmallows, yarn, cotton balls, fabric or cloth, paper plates, empty food containers.



Mother's Day

Make a card for your mother or a special mother in the neighborhood. Cut a flower from paper and attach it to the front of a card. Or, make a yarn picture. First draw a picture on colored paper. Then outline it with glue and cover the glue with yarn.

Memorial Day

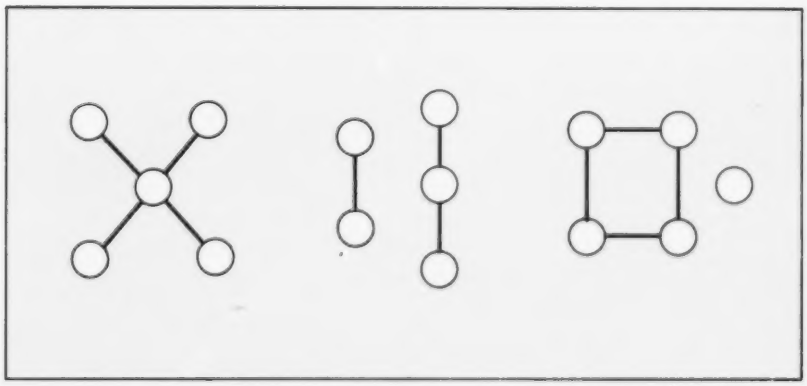
Talk about honoring the many soldiers who fought for our country and died. Read a story about Memorial Day. Look at pictures of Memorial Day celebrations in magazines or newspapers, or on TV. These activities will increase awareness of an important American holiday.

How Many Ways

Play the "How Many Ways" game with marshmallows. Pick a number to work with, such as five.

1. Arrange five marshmallows in a pattern and connect them with toothpicks.
2. Take another set of five marshmallows and think of a different way to arrange the marshmallows.
3. Continue until there are no more ways to "say" five. Some children will be ready to write equations for what they have shown.

Examples:



What Parents Have to Offer

Parents represent an untapped pool of talent. They are doctors, engineers, musicians, painters, philosophers, carpenters, plumbers, news reporters, and attorneys, each with very special knowledge and skills that can and should be shared with young people.

"Parents have always supplemented and enriched the educational experiences of my students. Some parents visit my classroom to share scientific research and/or information with students. Some come to make my students aware of different career opportunities. Many of these same individuals follow up their visits to school with invitations to their workplace. Some take part in forums and debates on current and controversial issues such as AIDS, abortion, and sex education in schools. Still others prepare food for students to take on overnight trips, tutor students, contribute gifts for school raffles, chaperone after-school activities, help start plants for science class, and repair broken equipment."

Parents, however, are capable of contributing even more to the educational experiences of their children. They can assist in the library and classroom, investigate field trip possibilities, help teachers

MAY HOME ACTIVITIES

Learn about Nutrition

Talk about the four food groups. Make a chart, such as the one shown. Complete the chart to determine if family meals are balanced.

OUR FOOD GROUPS

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Milk and Milk Products	B						
	D						
Meat, Eggs, Fish	B						
	D						
Fruits and Vegetables	B						
	D						
Bread and Cereals	B						
	D						

B = Breakfasts
D = Dinners

The older child might want to keep a more detailed food diary. For each day of the week, divide the sheet into Breakfast, Lunch, Snack, Dinner. Then enter the foods eaten, by category, as listed above.

make arrangements for special events, serve as interpreters, raise funds, and help prepare reading materials and listings of community services, resources, and educational television programs parents and children can watch together. They can also serve on committees to help formulate school policy and assist teachers in designing meaningful educational experiences for the students. The contributions parents can make to the learning experiences of their children are simply endless.

How One Teacher Involved Parents

Our school's reading achievement was dropping, as reflected in test scores, and frustration on the part of teachers and parents was growing to ominous proportions when I, as a reading specialist, decided to do something about the situation. I felt, in a way, guilty and somewhat responsible for the problem because it was my job to improve reading achievement, not oversee its decline. The time was ripe for some kind of direct and positive action to be taken to help our school back on its academic feet.

The approach that came to mind was getting parents more actively involved in their children's reading instruction. It was time to break the impasse, the malaise, the pervasive aura of frustration and complacency. All the parents needed was a push in the right direction. They had to come to school and talk to teachers, other parents, and administrators; and while they were there, they needed to find something they could take home and use immediately with their children. And so the "Parents As Reading Partners Free Loan Library" was created, in order to provide a model for successful home instruction. The project was later called "RAP" — Reading Aloud Partners. Setting up a new library in the PTA room was the first step. It would serve to supplement the local public library (which some parents never visited), the school library (which was not easily accessible to them because classes were always being conducted there), and the local bookstores (which were hardly ever patronized because children seemed to prefer video games and toys rather than books for presents).

After receiving some funds set aside for school improvement projects, as well as obtaining additional funding from an IMPACT II grant, the committee for school improvement gave its final approval to the concept of a parent read-aloud library. Children would not allowed to use the room. It was strictly for use by parents!

The library was centrally located on the first floor of the school. A bookshelf was obtained, and space in the room was allocated. Books of good quality literature were ordered, offering a wide range of topics and readability levels. An inventory was taken. A letter addressed to all parents was drafted in Spanish and English and distributed to every child in the school. Teachers and students were briefed through public address announcements and assembly programs. Every teacher received a list of books that were available.

A method of lending books was worked out with the parents. When parents came to the room, they were allowed to borrow a maximum of three books, each having a two-week due date. Parent volunteers recorded the transaction, indicating name and address of parent, child's teacher, and return date, on control cards and on cards placed in the

books themselves. Parents had to deal only with the other parents throughout the loan process. They could come in, browse, drink coffee, eat doughnuts, and have a good time without teacher and administrative interference.

Plans for expansion of the library include opening it to summer hours, and developing a cassette tape section, a bilingual area, a book-swapping section, and a book flea market area. We knew we had to try to get parents more involved and more committed. The process has now begun, and we hope that it will have a positive impact on reading achievement schoolwide.

When to Involve Parents

Parents should be involved in the educational process every step of the way. Parental involvement is the ultimate reinforcement for all learning activities, better than any homework assignment, test, report, or other assignment. It should be present to the extent that, when asked to name school workers, youngsters identify parents immediately following teachers.

Teachers should meet with parents on a regular basis. They should not limit themselves to the days allotted for teacher-parent conferences. These meetings may take the form of workshops, student-parent collaborations, trips, holiday celebrations, or informal visits. They should also occur quite naturally and informally, without seeming unusual in the school settings.

Adopt, adjust, or adapt the following schedule.

1. **Midsummer Tips:** Handouts available in the office about summer programs and study tune-ups suggested by teachers and counselors.
2. **August Orientation:** Orientation for parents before scho ol begins. An incentive to come might include early pickup of schedules.
3. **Opening Day:** First day of school welcome to parents. Coffee and doughnuts might be served.
4. **September Selections:** Choice of room mothers and fathers and PTA volunteers to assist in the school as hall monitors, typists, telephone assistants, teacher-aids, and organizers of special events.
5. **Daily Contacts:** Notes to parents or requests that they sign the student's work. The teachers can add a smiley face or a quick note of praise.
6. **Reports to Parents:** Report cards and other evaluations that are sent home on a regular basis.
7. **Telephone Conferences:** Telephone calls to parents as soon as a problem is foreseen.
8. **One-to-One Conferences:** Conferences involving the parents, the teacher, and sometimes the child when problems are better discussed in person.
9. **Cluster Meetings:** Joint conferences involving all of a child's teachers and his or her parents when a joint effort is needed.
10. **Awards Night:** Presentations of awards to students, parents, and special teachers.

If the above suggestions seem time-consuming, remember the child is going to require the time — the question is simply when. The time invested early on will result in saving time later by increasing rapport between home and school and by creating a more pleasant environment in the classroom for all.

For the benefit of the students, both parents and teachers must learn how to share knowledge, skills, and experience in a nonthreatening manner. Both parents and teachers must be willing to learn and develop those skills needed for effective teacher-parent communication and cooperation. Administrators and principals can help teachers and parents acquire necessary skills by allotting teachers sufficient time to take special courses at local colleges and universities and to attend in-service developmental sessions, while encouraging parents to participate in worthwhile training sessions. Administrators and principals can also help by welcoming parents to the school and enthusiastically supporting the efforts of both teachers and parents.

The bottom line is that we all need one another. Open teacher-parent collaboration works best when schools are flexible, have many different kinds of activities for parents, train and supervise their teachers and parents, are committed to carrying out all of the essential planning and administration of a program, and have strong administrative support. The success of open teacher-parent collaborations in our schools depends upon the attitudes of parents, teachers, administrators, staff, and principal. When the goal of parents and teachers is truly to enhance understanding between home and school, for the acknowledged purpose of furthering a child's educational growth, solutions to the obstacles preventing effective home-school collaboration are found.

Contributing Teachers:
Marilyn L. Dixon, Barbara Ann Carter Ellis, Sharon Garrity Larkin, Billie Preston, Marie A. Prisco, Steven Schneider, Carol Simiele, Beth Smuckler, Marylin Kurlan Sperling, Mary Villani

Carrying Out the Curriculum in School and in the Home

Subject	New Concepts	At-Home Activities
SOCIAL STUDIES (for kindergartners)	Family pride and self-identity: Knowing your own culture through family conversation.	Talk to your child. Give your children opportunities to talk to you and ask questions about themselves, their family, their role in the family, and their feelings.
LABELLING/NAME RECOGNITION (for kindergartners)	Learning that labels are names for different things. Naming things through observation.	Read a newspaper together with your child. Point out pictures that relate to an article, and discuss. When in a supermarket, show and tell the names of all foods and the families that they belong to, for example: asparagus, eggplant, squash—vegetables.
ART (for kindergartners)	Cutting, coloring, pasting.	Create an art center in your home. Keep art supplies in a shoebox (scissors, glue, crayons, pencils) and a stack of magazines. Have your child cut out things that we wear, eat, etc.
READING COMPREHENSION (for first graders/second graders)	Following simple written directions. Making picture/sentence associations. Predicting outcomes of stories. Finding the main idea of a story by its title.	Encourage your child to tell you in sequence what happened in his or her favorite stories. Point out traffic, street, and store signs in the neighborhood. Leave simple messages for your child at home. Have your child draw pictures and tell stories about them.
	Becoming familiar with all types of reading materials and developing an ability to discuss what is read.	Sign a contract with your child to read with him or her for 15 minutes a day. Keep a family record sheet.

Subject	New Concepts	At-Home Activities
MATHEMATICS (for first graders/second graders)	Spatial Relationships: Distinguishing between up and down, above and below, in, on, off, over, under, top, bottom, inside, outside, in front of, behind, before, after, between, next to, left, right, first, middle, last.	Have your child carry out directional activities at home, for example: "Put your shoes under the bed." "Draw a star above your name."
	Identifying values of dimes, quarters, half-dollars, pennies, nickels. Solving story problems relating to money. Identifying the value of a dollar bill as 100 cents. Writing money amounts using the dollar sign ($), the decimal point (.), and numbers. Learning how to make change through the value of 50 cents.	Play bank or store with your child. Make up a shopping list and have your child total amounts and give change.
	Rounding a two-digit number to the nearest ten. If the ones column is less than 5, we round to the smaller 10. If the ones column is 5 or more, we round to the higher 10.	Using a number line, have your child show you where a given number is located, i.e., between which two 10s. Rounding should be understood to mean which number the given number is closest to on a number line.
	Multiplying and dividing twos through 10, fives through 25, threes through 15, fours through 20.	Have your child group objects to understand that multiplication is repeated addition, for example: $3 \times 4 = 3$ groups of 4 objects. Have your child take an entire set and group them with equal amounts in each.
	Recognizing when an object is separated into parts of equal size. Identifying fractional parts, e.g., 1/2, 1/3, 1/4.	Separate candy bars into fifths. Have your child identify the parts as equal, and name each part (1/5, 2/5, 3/5, etc.).
WRITTEN LANGUAGE (for second graders)	Writing for a variety of purposes, including for information (report writing) and for pleasure (stories, journals, letters, poetry). Combining sentences into short paragraphs.	Before he or she goes to bed, have your child write for 10 minutes about anything that happened during the day. Use a notebook and label it "My Journal, by (*child's name*)."
	Writing letters and poetry. Selecting own topics. Creating new beginnings or new endings for existing stories. Learning to combine sentences into short paragraphs.	Give your child opportunities to write letters, thank-you notes, invitations to relatives/friends. Start your child off with the first line of a story, and let him or her continue. Help your child list words that he or she can use in a story focusing on one topic.

2 Communicating with Parents

"Friends are not often made by two parties in a car wreck."
Tim Hardin, Teacher

Communicating with the parents of the children we teach is the "hidden part of teaching" that goes hand in hand with our task of educating their children. It is, therefore, one of the most critical parts of the teaching profession. It requires skill, tact, organization, honesty, and availability. It may involve years of revamping and the flexibility to incorporate new methods to reach the parents.

No News Is No News

"Yesterday in my last class of the day, I heard a student call me by an obscene name, more than once. By the time I intervened, he'd gotten a good audience. Great.

"I talked to his parent this morning; I tried to contact her yesterday after school, the phone shaking in my hand, my face flushed with rage, but she was not at home. Perhaps this was fortunate — my anger dissipated by morning, my teacher-rational mind taking over, and I'm sure I made much more sense than I would have during my peak of temper. We had a nice little chat, beginning with my introduction as her son's English teacher, which she followed with, 'Yes, what's wrong?'

"What's wrong? How did she know? Did my voice still contain the fuming of yesterday? She was right, of course, and it made me wish that she was wrong, and although we had a nice little chat, I hung up the phone thinking that something was very definitely wrong.

"Why shouldn't parents feel hostility toward teachers and schools when the call from the school always means trouble? The reverse is true as well; a call from a parent is not often good news. As I thought this through, my hand still resting on the phone, I almost decided that I shouldn't have called at all, that I could have handled it myself with the deans, the coaches . . . all the alternatives went through my mind, and I had second thoughts, third thoughts . . ."

No news is good news, right? Wrong! Particularly when it comes to schools, children, and parents, it is not true that silence is golden.

Conditions must be just right for communication to be effective between teachers and parents. The teacher has a great opportunity to improve these conditions if he or she is willing to do so. Little things mean a lot. It is, for example, a little thing to set aside an appropriate amount of time and a proper place to meet the parent in a favorable setting. But this is two-thirds of the battle. If the teacher's attitude says to the parent, "I value parental input and will do all I can to promote it," the interaction will almost always be a success.

Breaking down Barriers to Partnerships

Changes in the structure of society and in the family unit present challenges to teacher-parent relationships. Some of the factors that directly affect communication include: **(1)** changes in society's views of life, school, and the value of education; **(2)** increasing numbers of single-parent families; **(3)** working mothers in two-parent families; **(4)** multiethnic student populations. In overcoming these barriers to parent involvement, teachers need to take the initiative in providing a variety of opportunities for mutual collaboration. In addition to telephone calls and notes, monthly newsletters, home visits, conferences, and teacher-parent workshops are

strategies that can be used in fostering teacher-parent partnerships.

"In order to develop these partnerships, it is important that the parents be concerned about their children. Those who do fail to take an interest in their children's educational progress may have serious personal adjustment problems of a short-term or chronic nature. Whatever the case may be, it is never my policy to pry or to interfere in family matters of a personal nature. However, if I am worried about a student in my class, and the parent consistently fails to show an interest in this troubled child, I will write a note to the principal to discuss the matter, and then the principal and I can determine cooperatively whether a guidance person should be called in to evaluate the situation. If, for example, a parent is overwhelmed by daily situations or by problems encountered in child rearing, perhaps some kind of professional help and support will assist that parent and improve that parent's performance."

It is essential that teachers get a feel for the parents they are dealing with. Just as every group of students is different, so are the parents. Some will be overzealous, others will be complacent. Somewhere in between will be most of the parents — involved and caring.

Dear Parents,

Welcome back! I hope you all enjoyed a restful summer vacation, as I have. In this letter, I hope to answer some questions you may have about the sixth-grade program I have designed for your child.

I base my curriculum upon the intellectual and social needs of the students. Sixth graders stand at a pivotal point in their lives — adolescence. As they undergo rapid intellectual and emotional change, they begin to explore our society and the possible roles that they may assume. It's an exciting time.

In addition to a comprehensive mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, and physical education program, to satisfy their intellectual and social needs, the students will read literature about great acts and deeds. These books will include the Arthurian legends, Greek mythology, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *Sounder*, and *The Bridge to Terabithia*. This curriculum requires rigorous study.

I ask you to join with me in a partnership, with the optimum intellectual and social growth for your child as our primary objective. You can reinforce my efforts in school in the following ways:

- Provide a quiet study area in your home. Ask your child if she or he has completed each day's assignment.
- Contact me if there are any questions or concerns. Timely communication between teacher and parent prevents problems from becoming needlessly larger. Please attend the conferences that are scheduled for the school year, and if possible, spend a morning, an afternoon, or a whole day in our classroom.
- Accept your child's accomplishments in school. Make comments that acknowledge his or her efforts.
- Volunteer to assist in the classroom to arrange bulletin boards, to read to the children, or to do anything you would feel comfortable doing.
- Join the PTA and support our fundraisers.

I am looking forward to an exciting year of teaching and learning — for both the students and myself. To keep you apprised, I will write a monthly newsletter that gives a brief account of school events. Please feel free to call me if you have any concerns or questions.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Hikawa

Rosemary Hikawa

Keep Those Calls and Letters Coming

Better communication is the key to better teacher-parent relationships. Perhaps the easiest and most neutral way of initiating this communication is through a friendly, conventional social greeting and introduction over the phone. The telephone call is useful in almost every way. First, the contact is personal because direct conversation is involved, and it is not as inconvenient as setting up a time and place for a meeting. The phone call takes place in neutral territory, since both parties remain in their own settings. The call serves as a quick means to get acquainted, or it at least expresses the teacher's desire to make some contact with the parent without any disciplinary reasons attached. Finally, you may enjoy the fact that when the parent asks you, "What's wrong?" you can answer with full, friendly conviction, "Absolutely nothing."

An alternative approach is to send a letter home to parents at the beginning of the year. The letter should be brief (no more than one page); upbeat, communicating your

enthusiasm for teaching; and informative, describing your personal and educational background, hobbies, interests, and plans for the school year. Such a letter allows parents to "see" you as a person and allows you to present a truer picture of yourself than they may be getting from their children.

Many schools are now adopting discipline programs that require teachers to set up discipline plans (lists of rules, consequences, and rewards) for their classrooms, and to inform parents of the plans by sending a letter home within the first two weeks of school. The letter includes a tear-off sheet at the bottom for parents to sign and return with their children. This is a good idea even if your school principal does not require it. When parents are aware of the rules in your classroom, they are more likely to be supportive if and when you must carry out a consequence.

You may be thinking: I don't have time to write all these letters, and the parents won't read them anyway. Think again. You may find yourself having to take the time to send notes home anyway, or make phone calls, or arrange meetings with parents to correct misperceptions that often occur when parents get only one story about what is happening at school — their child's. As for the second objection, most parents will read communications from their children's teachers if the letters are brief, clearly written, truly informative, and positive in tone. If some parents never receive the letters from their children or fail to read them, you can present them with a copy later, at a time when they may have questions. In any case, it will be to your advantage to have a record of this communication effort, especially during any conference that may be needed regarding a student's progress or behavior.

The whole point here is that communication sweeps away barriers. These are barriers that all of us experience before we pick up a phone to call someone, write a letter, or take a trip to meet someone — the reluctance, the fear, the feeling of disadvantage we have when we don't know anything about the person we are about to encounter. Your introductory letter, your discipline plan, and any follow-up communications ease these barriers. When parents feel comfortable approaching you, and feel positive about your programs and goals, you will be more likely to gain their support and build the partnerships that will meet their children's needs throughout the year.

Dear Parents,

I thought it would be good if you had a little information about your child's teacher, so I decided to send you this letter to introduce myself. As the year progresses, I hope I may have the opportunity to meet you.

I am originally from Ohio, but I have lived here in Connecticut for 18 years. I taught school for six years in Ohio and five years in Middletown, Connecticut, before coming to MacMurray School two years ago. I have taught first, third, and fifth grades and, for the past three years, fourth grade.

My education consists of a bachelor of science in education from Wright State University in Ohio, a master of arts in liberal studies from Wesleyan University, and a variety of courses and workshops in science education and outdoor education. I have also had a course in computer technology. I am currently receiving science education training in a two-year program sponsored by the National Science Foundation and Wesleyan University.

My family and I live in Middletown. My husband and I were married three years ago. He is a carpenter. My son, a junior at Middletown High School, was born in Colombia and came to live with me when I adopted him seven years ago.

My hobbies are walking, bird watching, gardening, rock collecting, reading, and playing tennis. I also enjoy going to concerts because I like almost every kind of music.

I enjoy teaching in Hartford because I find it interesting to work with youngsters of so many different backgrounds. They bring a variety of experiences and cultures with them to share with each other.

I am hoping to carry out some exciting science programs in my classroom, and your child should have the opportunity to do several projects of his or her own choosing, as well as the required projects. We will also be using new reading and math textbooks that present up-to-date information and skills. In social studies, we will be depending a great deal on newspapers for following current events and for help in learning geography and history.

I believe your child will have some fine opportunities for developing many skills and learning the things he or she needs to know to prepare for fifth grade. I plan to do my best to ensure that your child has a successful and enjoyable school year.

Sincerely yours,

Avis Wells

Avis Wells
Fourth-Grade Teacher

Suggested Parent Workshops

One way to reach parents is through workshops especially designed to address their concerns. Parent workshops can inform parents about issues relating to school, or can enlighten them on topics pertaining to the task of parenting.

The following is a list of suggested workshop topics:

1. How to review the report card.
2. Interpreting standardized test scores.
3. Utilizing school resources.
4. Understanding the school curriculum.
5. Providing a curriculum at home.
6. How to develop work and study habits that ensure school success.
7. Developing a nation of readers.
8. Cultural literacy.
9. Fads or reality: What's in vogue for parents of the 90s?
10. Nutrition.
11. How to pick a child or family therapist.
12. How to read aloud with your child.

One very effective approach to parent workshops, especially at the elementary level, is the establishment of a series of "make-and-take" workshops. For these workshops, parents and teachers meet at school and prepare activities and games that can be used at home with the children. The activities are directly related to concepts being learned in academic areas during the school day. The teachers are able to demonstrate the most effective use of certain concepts and materials. The parents are made to feel that they are an integral part of their children's educational process. Ideally, the workshops are held on a regularly scheduled basis. Time can be provided at the conclusion of each session for a question-and-answer period.

For those parents who cannot attend the workshops, packets can be prepared and sent home, and a follow-up phone call can be made by the teacher to provide further explanation of the activities. It is advantageous to have the workshop activities revolve around a monthly academic theme.

Dear Parents,

On Friday evening between 6:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., P.S. 116's Parent Orientation Program (P.O.P.) will be presenting its first parent workshop in our school cafeteria. The presentation will inform you of how you can best get involved with your child's learning activities. Parents will receive a curriculum guide developed by the P.O.P. team, home activities, and other handouts suggested by our own teachers and by the district's developmental team.

Refreshments will be served.

Remember, parental involvement helps children to learn more effectively. Parents are the link between home and school. You are your child's first and most influential teacher. What parents do to help their children learn will affect them for the rest of their lives.

Please come and join this "chain" of support.

Kindly fill out the slip below and have your child return it to his or her teacher tomorrow.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

James Silver

James Silver
Teacher-in-Charge
P.O.P.
School Training Team

Child's Name ---------- Class ---------
Parent's Name ----------
I will be able to attend ----------
I will not be able to attend ----------
Parent's Signature ----------

Start, Look, and Listen

Start with yourself. Effective communication with parents begins with you — with your professionalism, your attitude, and your realization that the parent is a vital part of the education of the child. In a professional yet compassionate manner, your mission is to communicate with parents frequently and for positive, helpful reasons. By contacting parents with concerns about their child or with positive news of a student's improvement, you convey the message of an educator — that you care deeply about the well-being of each of your students.

Look at yourself. Communicating with parents while looking more professional brings an element of respect. The raising of standards comes by your mode of dress as well as by your words.

Listen to yourself. Find a place where you can be alone. Tape yourself in a practice conversation with a parent. Then listen, really listen to yourself. Would you feel confident if you were a parent conversing with you? Among the many courses you as a teacher must take to keep abreast of your profession, take a course in effective communication or public speaking. It will really help give you a sense of competence and confidence.

Being competent in your field, dressing professionally, and speaking well will give parents a wonderful sense of confidence in you. It will give you, the educator, what you truly deserve — the respect for your profession that can only begin with yourself!

Weekly Progress Reports

Sending weekly progress reports to parents makes youngsters aware that someone at home is closely following their progress in school. Frequently, high school students in particular feel that their parents are too busy to be concerned about what happens to them in school. However, when their parents become involved with their teachers, students become motivated to try harder to succeed in school. They even become more willing to ask their parents for help with school problems.

On a continuing basis, parents need to be informed about their child's progress. Using suggestions from other teachers, and incorporating ideas of your own, you can easily develop a weekly progress report that goes home from the first to the last week of school. Doing this takes time and effort, but the benefits from it far outweigh the drawbacks.

An effective weekly progress report does the following:

1. It names the child and lists the dates it covers.
2. It indicates whether all assigned work was completed on time.
3. It points out how well the work was done.
4. It indicates the type of behavior exhibited by the child.
5. It indicates the type of work habits the child demonstrated during the week.
6. It includes a section for comments. You may want to use this section to let the parents know specifically in what areas their child is having difficulty. Children often bring home the good papers but seem to "lose" the "not-so-hot" ones. This section also includes anything not covered by sections 2-5.
7. It provides instructions for the parent regarding signing and returning the report by the next school day.

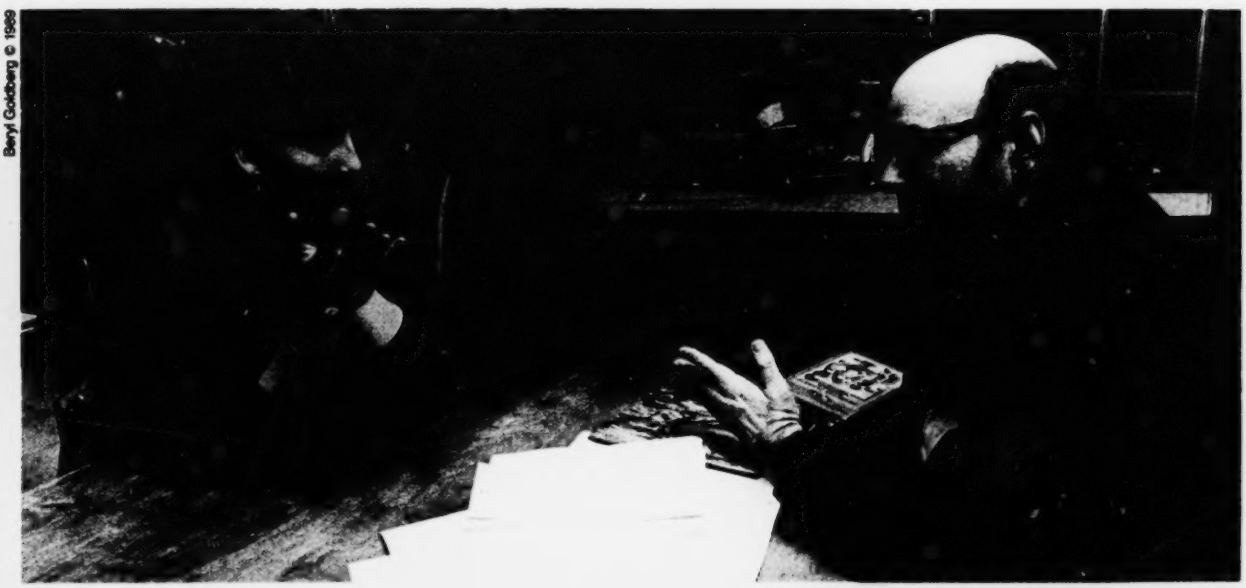
This weekly report affords the teacher the opportunity to keep the parents informed about all aspects of their child's week in school. It prevents problems from lasting, or intensifying. It keeps the lines of communication open on a continuous basis. Being honest in your comments also precludes having to explain your grading decisions at a later date.

Getting the Most from Teacher-Parent Conferences

Most teachers are dedicated and love their professions, but the heavy load of paper work, teacher assessments, disciplining students, and teaching itself often leaves them devoid of time and energy for positive interactions with parents. In many conferences little is accomplished because mainly grades and behavior are discussed, in a superficial manner at best. Often the consequences are negative, especially for the student.

Although it takes precious time and energy, providing meaningful conferences for parents is crucial in developing partnerships. You can help parents to feel more confident in their meetings with you. Make invitations warm and cheerful. At the conference, sit together at a table for two or more. Serve cookies, have a slide presentation, perhaps, and display photographs of the students and samples of their excellent work. Student work folders should be readily accessible. You may even want to supply voter registration forms and articles of interest to parents. Offer brochures on school and community services such as peer tutoring and a homework hotline number, whatever is available.

Try to get helpful information from the parent. What is the child's before-school morning routine? How much TV viewing is allowed? Is there a dictionary at home? A world or U.S. map? Does the child have an after-school job or other responsibilities? Is there a parent home in the evenings? Does the



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child have any health problems? What creative interests does he or she have? At home, is the child experiencing difficulty with homework? With the textbook? Does he or she seem to enjoy school? What are the parent's goals for the child? Does the parent have suggestions for the teacher? This information can be gathered in 10 minutes and can be quite useful.

Be honest but encouraging about the student's academic levels. Present the child's strengths and weaknesses and discuss how you hope to improve the student's skills and reasoning powers. Discuss what you can do together, at school and at home, to maximize learning.

A checklist of questions that parents can ask at teacher-parent meetings ideally should be distributed before open school night. These questions might include:

- How often is homework given? What is the nature of the homework, and approximately how long should it take to complete? Are there special projects required such as book reports, term papers, or artwork?
- What textbooks are used, and are they required in school daily? On what reading level are they?
- Are notes taken in class daily?
- How frequently are exams given? What is the nature of the tests — do they include essays?
- Does the teacher have samples of the child's work to show the parent?
- What are the child's test scores?
- Does he or she owe homework or a project? Can he or she make up missed assignments?
- How is his or her class participation? His or her attendance and punctuality?
- Are there hands-on experiences in class such as labs? Is special equipment required?
- Most important, is the child working up to his or her potential?
- What can the parent do at home to help the child?
- What extra services are available if the child needs academic help or counseling?

Tips for Teachers Concerning Parent Conferences

DO

- **Listen and ask questions to help the parent clarify the problem.**
- **Treat the parent as an equal in working with the child.**
- **Be friendly and cooperative. (Serve the parent's and the child's needs.)**
- **Seek the resources which this parent has to offer.**
- **Get the information which the parent has, and supply what else is needed.**
- **Give specific examples of behavior that concerns you.**
- **Leave the parent plenty of pride and self-concept with which to attack the problem and cooperate.**
- **Get the parent to agree with you in some areas — by being supportive and positive.**
- **Ask the parent for his or her own ideas for dealing with the problem — seek parent suggestions that concur with school policies.**
- **Try to see the problem from the parent's and/or the child's viewpoint.**
- **Correct your own errors; consider other ways of handling a problem; be mature and open.**

DON'T

- **Do all the talking.**
- **Talk down to the parent.**
- **Be hostile, defensive, or critical.**
- **Assume the parent knows nothing of importance.**
- **Assume the parent has the same information you have.**
- **Make generalised statements which leave the parent confused and unable to tackle the problem.**
- **Push the parent into a corner so that he or she has to be defensive.**
- **Make only negative comments.**
- **Play, "Yes, but. . ."**
- **Consider only your own viewpoint.**
- **Consider yourself infallible. (You may have been in error; admit a mistake if necessary.)**

Encourage parents to ask you questions. Also, ask them questions that might yield valuable information, such as: *"How does David feel about the work we are doing in class?" "Has Maria told you about our science project for this month?" "Has Jose been feeling comfortable about his progress in math?"* When parents respond, take notes to show not only that you care, but also that you consider their remarks important and intend to follow up on them.

During a teacher-parent conference it may be necessary to discuss "bad news." This is where weekly progress reports seem to alleviate what can be a major problem. If there has been a situation that needed attention, the continuing communication over the past weeks has prevented it from becoming a "bombshell." The problem may have already been settled, or may still be in the process of being resolved. At this point, the parent, or teacher, can spend valuable time discussing what has been done to solve the problem, rather than laying a never-discussed problem in someone's lap for the first time.

The most beneficial part of ongoing parent involvement is that the students know from the very beginning that the teacher is in direct communication with their parents. There isn't much that can be done out of line that their parents will not be made aware of. They also know that a favorable weekly report with its upbeat comments is a goal to strive for on a regular basis.

Eleven Helpful Hints for Successful Conferences

1. Make the parents comfortable, welcomed, at home in your space. As opposed to staying seated at your desk when they walk in, get up and greet them with a handshake and a smile.
2. Have a sign-up sheet at the door for parents to list their names and their child's name, and have a monitor to assist you. This will facilitate your knowing who it is you are addressing and will enable you to offer a more graceful and warm greeting. Such a greeting will help set the tone for a homier, more meaningful conference.
3. Thank the parents for taking the time to attend the meeting, making mention of your awareness of today's busy schedule, heavy traffic, or bad weather.
4. Dress up. Let the parents know that you think a great deal about them and their importance. Convey the feeling that you feel proud to be Johnny's teacher, that you are proud to be a teacher, that you are a professional.
5. Furnish your visitors with a snack (nuts and raisins, perhaps). In some cultures people are given a taste of honey upon first embarking on the learning experience, in order to associate this moment with sweetness.
6. Have on hand as much information as possible regarding the student's performance: test marks, papers, drawings. . .personal comments, reactions, attitudes. In short, have a thorough knowledge of the youngster.
7. Find something complimentary to say. Praise some aspect of the student's work, character, or personality. Slowly lead into the areas where improvement is needed. Tactfully but firmly stress the need for focusing upon these deficiencies.
8. Elicit suggestions from the parents as to how they can assist in the process of improving their child's performance, grades, attendance, or attitude. How can they become part of the solution? How can they show concern? In what ways can they become involved? Ask them for their ideas. Involve them in the process.
9. Enlist the parents' assistance as much as possible. Find out what the household's makeup and schedule are like. Are both parents at home? Are they working? What time do they come home? Does the student work? When does he or she do homework? When does he or she study? Is there a place set aside for this activity? Could the parents assist in any way, for instance by reading while the student does his or her homework? (The temptation for the student to watch television is greater when other members of the family are doing so.)
10. Provide the parents with a schedule of tests, papers, midterms, and finals so that they can be aware of the dates. The schedule will facilitate their involvement, show that you are concerned, and give the youngster the guidance needed both in school and at home.
11. Most of all, listen. . .between the lines. Peter Sellers in *Being There* kept repeating, "I understand." This endeared him to everyone, and he was perceived as being wise and compassionate. Allowing the parents to talk. . .to communicate. . .to complete as much as possible your picture of the student will be most valuable in helping you work with the student. Embrace parents as your allies.

"As a teacher I have sometimes been guilty of the 'get this over with' conference syndrome, but after years of teaching both in the U.S. and in foreign countries, I have decided that a conference need not be lengthy nor too organized to be successful. Hence, I have endeavored to set out some tips which any teacher can modify to suit his or her own unique needs, situation, and personality.

"Do not follow the same format for every parent. Each parent is different, and any assembly-line type of information will most likely fall on deaf ears. Be spontaneous, and talk about relevant happenings concerning the child. However, guard against being impulsive. Know your students and have something specific to tell the parents."

There are times when a problem is best solved between parent and teacher. Other times it can be advantageous and important to have a student attend the conference. Even young children can understand their responsibility for learning and behavior in the classroom. Including students in a conference emphasizes this responsibility and allows them to participate in seeking a solution. It also makes them aware of the concerns of both their parents and teachers, as well as of the cooperative effort that is being implemented between the home and the school.

A group conference may be scheduled by the teacher in order to present to a group of parents a brief summary of shared common goals. This is a time for everyone to get acquainted and talk about common interests. As a follow-up, some parents may request individual meetings.

Another Way to Communicate with Parents

Sometimes, the only way to reach a parent is through a home visit. Frequently, the parent will be more comfortable and less threatened in this environment. Leave your briefcase and educational jargon at school. This is the time to be positive. Ask open-ended questions which require more than a yes or no answer. Avoid why questions and blame placing. Remember, this type of parent needs to experience fast success so that another failing situation doesn't develop, thus alienating the parent even more.

Alerting Teachers to Problems

Encourage parents to tell you about any problems they have with their child's school experience. Parents can communicate their concerns by writing notes or calling the school and requesting a conference. They may want to list problems and ask what procedures can be used to correct them.

Dear Mrs. Taylor:

Bradley stated that you were absent from school on Thursday, February 18, and would be absent on Friday, February 19. We all hope that it is nothing serious and you will return to school soon.

On Friday afternoon, with the permission of the substitute teacher, I assisted Bradley in locating his math workbook to take home and review over the weekend. We feel that Bradley is not getting enough exposure to math.

Our Friday evening mail included a letter from the school. Ironically the envelope contained Bradley's achievement test results. We were disappointed but not surprised that Bradley scored below average in mathematics computation and mathematics concepts and applications, compared to other second-grade students across the country.

The areas in which Bradley scored the highest (vocabulary, reading, and word attack) are the areas he enjoys because of your teaching of literature, written composition, and creative writing, and your emphasis on the arts. I must admit that in the home, we also stress reading and related activities, i.e., crossword puzzles, cooking, literature.

At this time, I am asking for your suggestions on ways to increase Bradley's understanding of mathematics computation, concepts, and applications. We realize and accept the fact that parents and teachers are partners in teaching children. We believe your creative method of teaching and your creative room environment have stimulated our child in his desire to learn. We believe Bradley's self-esteem has been enhanced to the point where no challenge is too great. We thank you for that.

In closing, we would like to reemphasize that we wish to work with you in providing our son with a stronger foundation in math. We would appreciate math homework that is at a second-grade level, and some examples of third-grade math. Also, when Bradley brings in extra credit homework, we would appreciate it if you would not throw it away after reviewing it.

We will work hard to arrange our work schedules so we can spend some time in your classroom over the next four months, to assist you in any way that we can. We would like to hear a response to our request for suggestions to increase our son's competency in math by February 29.

Sincerely,

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Curtis

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Curtis

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Curtis,

This letter is in response to your expressed concern regarding Bradley's "lack of exposure to math." In reference to the achievement test scores, the test results that you received represent Bradley's ability level as of September. As I am sure you are aware, a test is not always the most accurate instrument for determining the knowledge and understanding that a child may have about a particular subject matter. A child's ability to perform well on a standardized test may fluctuate as a result of a variety of factors. Bradley has demonstrated that he is capable of working at the second-grade level in the area of mathematics.

Attached, please find a copy of the school district's Mathematics Grade Chart. This chart outlines the specific skills that are to be introduced, mastered, and reinforced at the second-grade level. I have taken the liberty of yellowing in the skills that are to be mastered. In addition, for your use and information, in the next few months I will be concentrating on the skills that are outlined in orange.

As you will note on page 248, computational skills in the second grade include mastery of addition and subtraction facts, using both two- and three-digit numbers without regrouping. The district also requires the introduction and development of addition and subtraction facts with regrouping (carrying and borrowing).

In my classroom, depending upon their academic capabilities, children are taught an understanding of the following mathematical operations, including but not limited to: patterning; sorting and classifying; counting; graphing; numeration at the concept, connecting, and symbolic levels; and place value.

As a result of the varied interest and academic levels of a large proportion of children in my classroom, I actively strive to encourage and develop the students' interests in geometry, problem solving, and multiplication. It seems appropriate and important to have "hands-on" manipulative experiences, especially for children at this age. In my classroom, mathematics is integrated into a variety of academic experiences, i.e., the children will have the opportunity to learn the denomination and use of money in relation to the operation of a classroom restaurant.

In closing, I would like to say how appreciative I am of

your interest in Bradley's academic development. I have always felt that good parenting is essential in contributing to a child's feeling of well-being. This attitude in turn contributes to his or her successful participation in the educational process. Bradley demonstrates a keen interest in learning, and I am pleased if I have contributed to his self-esteem in this regard.

Sincerely,

Deborah Taylor

Ms. Deborah Taylor

You may want to make available a "teacher alert" form for each grading period that lists skills. The parent can use the form to identify which skills they think need attention. The teacher can then focus on those areas and suggest ways that the parent can reinforce the skills at home.

"Happy-Grams" or other types of positive communication can inform parents about fine work and behavior, and children will receive positive feedback about their good efforts.

To:
From:
Re:
Your child has demonstrated outstanding:
work ---------- effort ----------
behavior ----------cooperation ----------
attitude ----------other ----------
Let's compliment your child.

FINAL EXAM

DIRECTIONS: Good afternoon, teachers! The following exam will assess your knowledge in the area of teacher-parent partnerships. Read each item and all choices carefully before selecting the best answer. Choose one answer only for each item.

---

1. **What is a teacher-parent partnership?**
   - **A.** Teacher/Parent associates
   - **B.** Teacher/Parent colleagues
   - **C.** One who is on the same team as another
   - **D.** All of the above

2. **How important is a teacher-parent partnership?**
   - **A.** Extremely important
   - **B.** Very, very, very important
   - **C.** Tremendously important
   - **D.** All of the above

3. **What are some ways to get to know your parents?**
   - **A.** Introduce yourself at the beginning of the year by sending each family a card thanking them for the privilege of having their child in your classroom, and following up with a weeknight telephone call.
   - **B.** Let the parents know if you yourself are both a parent and a teacher; they will appreciate your dual role and coinciding perspectives.
   - **C.** In order to establish a rapport with the parents and make the first open-house experience very relaxing for all involved, encourage the parents to get together with you as a group or team prior to the formal event.
   - **D.** All of the above

4. **What are some ways to break down barriers to teacher-parent partnerships?**
   - **A.** If one of your students happens to mention an important event taking place during the approaching weekend (Bill's soccer championship, Mom's final exams), express an interest and share in the excitement by telephoning the family for the outcome.
   - **B.** Make a telephone call promoting a meeting on neutral grounds: "Hello, Mrs. Jones! How are you? I was considering doing some paperwork in the playground area after school and wondered if that might be a good time to discuss Cindy's progress."
   - **C.** Utilize self-disclosure techniques during conversations: "I really admire your diligence in helping Larry with his homework. I must tell you that I was very excited to hear you were able to come today."
   - **D.** All of the above

5. How could you provide parents with guidelines on getting the most out of their meetings with teachers?

A. Compile a list based on a little personal research, and send it to parents prior to the first meeting. Include such areas as: work/study habits, home and school responsibilities, field trips, major projects, behavioral management, and general comments, questions, or concerns.

B. Send home an invitation to the meeting that has been artistically designed by the children, and note the areas which you, the teacher, will cover.

C. Send home a sample dialogue of a staged, upbeat conference between teacher and parent.

D. All of the above

6. What mechanisms could parents use to alert teachers to problems?

A. If "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" . . . then how about "An apple today means parents have something to say." If a child brings an apple on any given day, it would give notice that Mom and Dad need a call.

B. Inform parents at the beginning of the year that a simple signature on the homework sent home is sufficient (Mrs. Thompson). However, a formal signature (Mrs. Dolores J. Thompson) notifies the teacher to call the parent.

C. Provide parents with an all-purpose form which they can use to notify you of problems and successes.

D. All of the above

7. How should you manage an effective teacher-parent conference?

A. Physically greeting parents at the classroom door gives them a welcome feeling. Allowing them to be seated next to you at the table, as opposed to across from you, puts them on an even level.

B. The day before the conference, have the students bring in a complete set of their own clothes. Have them stuff the clothes with paper and make a head out of a stuffed paper bag, with a self-portrait face on the front. Have the students place their academically inclined dummies on their desks. The classroom full of surrogate students will throw a bit of humor into what is sometimes a tense situation.

C. During the conference, be friendly, specific, positive, direct, confident, knowledgeable, professional, human, attentive, patient, realistic, organized, thorough, enthusiastic, and ambitious.

D. All of the above

8. How can you give bad news helpfully?

A. Boost the negatives with positives: "Suzie is a serious child and tries hard to succeed. She has the ability to do excellent work but is held back by tenseness." "Bill is a friendly child. However, he needs to develop more confidence in himself."

B. Avoid jargon. If the child bugs other kids, he is "overcritical and aggressive." If she doesn't ever try, she is "inconsistent and inattentive." Constantly clowning becomes "restless and talkative."

C. After discussing problems or potential problems with the parents, have some possible solutions available to help form the foundation of a program that both you and the parent can devise, as a team. Include Mom and Dad in deciding whether contingency contracts, reinforcers (tangible and edible), star charts, bonus points, special days, extra-curricular activities, hugs, praise, or teacher-helper status would be most effective.

D. All of the above

This is the conclusion of the exam. If you chose letter "D" for all of your answers, now is the time to give yourself an A+!

Rob Schoenbaum

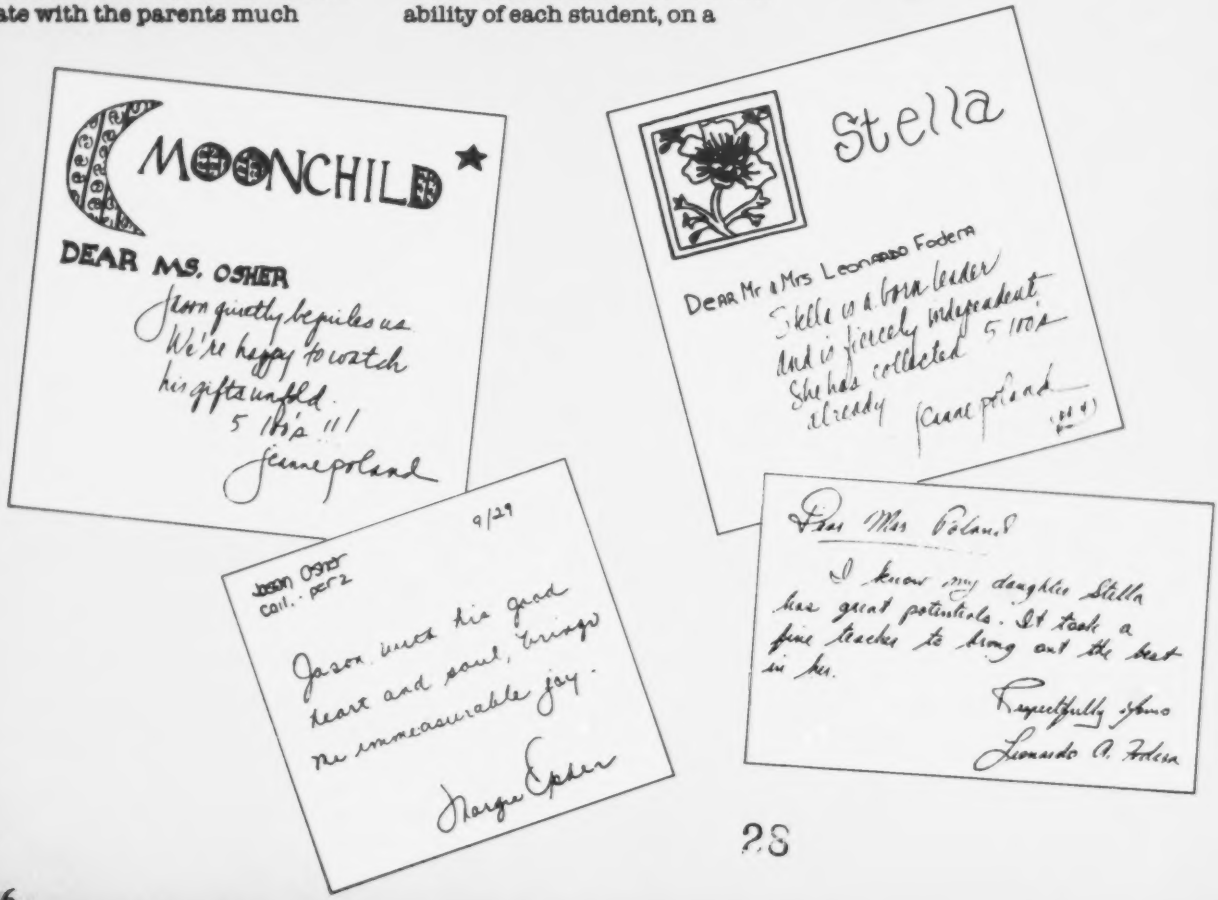
At Stuyvesant High School in New York City, parents host an annual breakfast for teachers in the school cafeteria. It always helps to know you are appreciated.

Contributing Teachers:
Kate Arleen Bressler, Miriam K. Cohen, Patricia Crowley, Robyn Forman, Timothy P. Gangwer, Tim Hardin, Charlotte Higuchi, Deborah Hoadies, Rochelle S. Kaplan, Sharon Garrity Larkin, Eileen Luckner, Shirley M. Myles, Paul James Nicolardi, Bernadine C. Orintas, Elizabeth Rainn, Robert Sarnoff, Carole Simiele, Donna Regina Strand, Doris E. Tariska, Dortha Cool Willets, Brian Withers

Letterheads, Logos, and Positive Reinforcement

During the fall semester of 1988, I found myself teaching art at a large New York City school to a multiethnic group of vigorous young people from Russia, Israel, Haiti, Korea, China, Japan — and Brooklyn. I noticed that the school had scheduled the teacher-parent conferences for November 15th, but I felt that I should communicate with the parents much sooner, both to introduce them to the work we were doing in the art room and to apprise them of how their youngsters were progressing.

So, I had each student design notepaper with a letterhead or logo typifying his or her personal style and psyche. Then I wrote a positive observation about the behavior or scholastic ability of each student, on a sheet of his or her paper, and sent the notes home. I requested that the letters be signed and equally positive comments be written by the parents, informing me of how they perceived their sons and daughters. Following are some of the more charming examples of what I received from parents:



3 Organizing and Scheduling Techniques for Teachers and Parents

All too often, teachers can be heard to comment about the unavailability of the parents they really want to see, or about the parents who, with the best of intentions, are interfering with what is happening in the classroom. If parents are not appropriately involved with their children's education, it isn't always because they don't want to be.

The reasons for lack of involvement may vary, ranging from cultural ideas (e.g., their background says that teachers know best and parents shouldn't interfere) to lack of time or feelings of inadequacy. At the other end of the spectrum are the parents who hover over homework, pressure children to do more and better, and teach their children higher-level skills before they have mastered basic concepts.

Parents and teachers may assume opposing positions and proceed to become defensive. These defenses must be broken down in order for the children to receive the best education possible. When children see that their parents and teachers are working together, their lives become easier, their potential for success increases, and they do not end up playing one against the other as an avoidance technique.

Parent involvement helps children learn more effectively. Yet schools are seeing an increasing number of children from households where parents are unavailable to assist in the educational process. These parents DO want to help their children succeed in school and may be aware that their involvement can make a big difference in their children's learning. However, because of outside job and financial pressures, or because of cultural differences, they fail to attend conferences regularly, go on field trips, assist in classroom happenings, or simply help their child with long division or difficult spelling words.

How can teachers engage these parents in an educational partnership and still take into account their limitations and needs? The answer lies in having realistic expectations. Some parents are not eager to bake cupcakes for an entire third-grade class, or to sew costumes for a Christmas festival. Do not ask them to participate in these kinds of activities. They will become embarrassed at having to refuse to help, and chances are you will not hear from them for the rest of the year. What kinds of interaction can you expect?

Strategies for Involving Parents

The following are some suggestions for activities that all parents can participate in, which do not make great demands on their limited time and do not require them to demonstrate skills they do not possess.

Have parents sign their children's homework every night. Send home a letter at the beginning of the year explaining to parents that they are "entitled" to know what their child has been doing in school and can get a clear picture of this by following the homework daily. Explain in the letter that if they find their child does not understand part of the homework, they should not feel obliged to teach him or her the lesson but should simply write you a note on the homework. Even if the parent returns home from work after the child has gone to bed, the homework can be left on the kitchen table for this nightly signature.

We all acknowledge that reading together is an important home activity, but do not expect parents to set aside half an hour every night to read with their child before bed. They may have more than one child and other responsibilities. There are many opportunities for cooperative reading that do not require blocks of a parent's time. Suggest that they might have their child read to them from a book or newspaper while they are making dinner, or have their child read recipe directions as they prepare the food. This way, reading can become a shared activity that is also a natural part of the daily routine.

Have parents ask their child to accompany them to the supermarket. What better way for a student to gain first-hand practice with addition, multiplication, making change, and reading?

Avoid assigning large craft projects, such as clay maps, models, and science projects, to be done at home. Many parents are unable to stock arts and crafts materials at home and may resent having to purchase these items. They may also be unable to give their child help in completing the project. Instead, send home a note explaining the upcoming project, and ask parents to contribute items they might have at home (coffee cans, towel holders,

Beryl Goldberg © 1989

If parents are too busy to read books to their children, suggest they read the newspaper together.

shoe boxes, odd pieces of material or ribbons) so that the project can be completed in school. Allot time in school, perhaps on a long Friday afternoon, for the project to be finished, and then send home the completed project for the parents' approval. With this method, those children who cannot get help at home from their parents will not feel inferior when their project is compared with an extravaganza that some other parent spent Sunday afternoon constructing.

Be willing to have parent conferences on the telephone; and by all means, call with a good report, something that a parent can feel proud of, as well as a negative report. This way your voice won't become the dreaded voice of doom, and parents will be more willing to work with you for the good of their child.

As a homework assignment, ask students to interview their parents. Give them several days to complete the assignment, just in case a parent is not home on a particular evening. As a class, generate the list of questions to be asked. Topics may include how holidays are celebrated, why parents chose to live in this geographic location, or three wishes for the family. Parents will realize that their opinions and input are considered important and a valuable contribution to the class.

Above all, let parents know that you understand their time constraints and cultural differences, and are willing to communicate with them on their terms as well as yours. Send home photocopies of class work or summaries of interesting class events. Keep in touch, so that parents know and become interested in what is going on in school. They will then be better able to talk with their children.

Activities that Involve Parents

Always give parents, even those of your best students, some suggestions for how they can contribute to their children's progress academically or socially. Help parents feel that you and they are in a partnership that is working to make this year of school a very successful one for their child.

Many parents read the newspaper every day. This valuable and convenient educational tool is often overlooked. Since the parent is going to read the newspaper anyway, why not request that the child pick out one article each day to read and discuss with the parent? In this way, the parent can provide the child with a daily informal reading lesson.

Photography is another way to involve parents in an educational activity. Ask parents to shoot a roll of film of the family doing the things they like to do best. Many family outings are likely to be planned around this assignment, especially to places that allow for quality interaction be-

GREAT STARTS FOR PARENTS

Here is a list of suggestions that provide important guidelines to help parents start their children off right:

Breakfast. Make sure your child begins each day with a good breakfast. Try to arrange to have snacks and other meals at regular times. Having meals at approximately the same time each day is a good way to introduce the concept of time and to reinforce the importance of schedules.

Schedules. Inform your children of your schedule at home and on the job. Talk about time and use time words. For example, you might say, "School starts at 8:40 a.m." "You attend Resource Room at one o'clock today."

Homework. Have your child do homework at a time when you are available to review it. Try to keep to the same schedule each day. Remember to ask about your child's day, and tell about yours. These daily conversations will help your child to develop communication skills.

Reading. Read with your child each day. Newspapers, short stories, and poetry can be the basis of enjoyable shared experiences.

In all your interactions with your child, remember to praise success. Be specific in your praise, for example, "I'm happy you finished your homework." When negative feedback is in order, also be specific, and try to balance a negative comment with a positive one. For example, you might say, "I'm sad that you had a fight in school today, but I feel good that your were able to talk about it with me."

tween parents and children. Create a collage of the photos on the bulletin board. If a single picture is worth a thousand words, imagine the statement the bulletin board display will make to students and parents alike.

A third way to involve parents in your classroom on a regular basis is to have their children ask them questions and record their answers. Watch the students' writing skills soar with this assignment! Questions might include: What is nuclear energy? How can we use nuclear energy in a positive way? Do you think we will ever have a nuclear war? What would you do if you knew you had only a few weeks to live? The list of questions is endless, and you can keep parents involved in answering questions all year long.

Similarly, you might involve parents in your literature-based program. As the class moves through a book, parents can be asked to read the same selections and answer the same questions. Students will enjoy comparing their answers to those of their parents; parents will appreciate the opportunity to have meaningful discussions with their children.

"Two techniques that have been quite successful for me with my class of six- and seven-year-olds are 'Oral Book Reports' and 'Friday Folders.'

"Once a week, as a class, we go to the library. At the end of the library period, each child borrows a library book for the week. The following week, before the books are exchanged for other books, the children give oral book reports, telling as much as they can about the stories. This requires someone at home — a parent, an older sibling, a relative, or a friend — to read the story with or to the child, perhaps more than once, discussing the story until the child feels comfortable enough to give an oral book report.

"'Friday folders' are absolutely worth the effort. Every Friday afternoon, before dismissal, the children are given their folders, which by the end of the year look like they have been through a war. The children's schoolwork for the week goes home in the folder, along with a comment from me. The folder is returned on

Thanksgiving Activities

1. Visit the local library with your child and read about the history of the Thanksgiving holiday. Ask your child to think of reasons why it is meaningful to keep this tradition hundreds of years after it began. Discuss what it must have been like to be a child in 1620.
2. Have your child view the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and sketch a picture of his or her favorite float. Together, briefly list the reasons for his or her choice.
3. Provide your child with a notebook in which to keep a journal about Thanksgiving vacation. Encourage him or her to enter one notation per day and accompany it with an illustration.
4. Select a favorite family recipe. Together, prepare this recipe for Thanksgiving dinner.
5. Let your child participate in the preparation of Thanksgiving dinner. For example, ask your child to wash and peel the vegetables and set the table.
6. Encourage your child to smell the aromas that fill the house as the meal is being prepared. Have your child strengthen his or her senses by identifying the different types of smells.
7. Have your child list the things for which he or she is thankful. Discuss the choices.
8. Write the word "Thanksgiving" vertically. Have your child write a Thanksgiving term for each letter in the word.
9. Take photographs of your Thanksgiving Day celebration. With your child, place the photos in sequential order and discuss the events. Create a scrapbook of family celebrations.
10. Select Thanksgiving stories to share with your child. Read them aloud or ask your child to read them to younger siblings.
11. Allow your child to interview you or other relatives about how you celebrated Thanksgiving as children. Use of a tape recorder may allow the child to create an oral history of the family.
12. Staple four sheets of paper together and ask your child to illustrate four aspects of the Thanksgiving holiday.
13. Have your child write and illustrate a story on the topic of how Thanksgiving will be celebrated in the future.
14. Encourage your child to write a "review" of his or her Thanksgiving vacation.
15. Have your child write a letter to the teacher sharing information about Thanksgiving vacation.
16. Allow your child to sketch the family as they are gathered for Thanksgiving dinner.
17. Have your child tape-record recollections of his or her vacation. Children can also tape-record original holiday stories.

Monday with the papers removed and the folder signed by the parents.

"My comments can include 'Johnny had a very good week;' 'Brenda did some really great work in math this week;' 'Ramon could use some extra help with his number facts,' or 'Elizabeth seemed short-tempered on Wednesday. Did anything unusual happen that day?' Parents get their chance to write a comment back to me on Monday, telling me about something happening in their child's life, work that they are doing at home together, successes, problems, and so forth. Sometimes they just sign their names."

From little acorns giant oaks grow. From parent involvement, however limited, throughout the school year, lines of communication open up between parents, teachers, and children, and the education process is enhanced.

Once parents know that you feel their help is important, that you can work flexibly with them, that you do not expect heroic or superhuman feats from them, they will be less reluctant to approach you and their child's schooling and will develop a more positive, helpful attitude. Who knows? Sometimes even an heroic feat can be forthcoming from a parent who feels secure and knows how important his or her help really is.

Beryl Goldberg © 1989

"Sometimes even an heroic feat can be forthcoming from a parent who feels secure and knows how important his or her help really is." Pictured above: mothers make a birthday party for a class in Central Park, New York City.

Contributing Teachers:
Kate Arleen Bressler, Sheila Clapkin, Barbara Ann Carter Ellis, Joel Finkel, Carol P. Jacobs, Leslie J. Sussman, Dortha Cool Willets

1 **Look! Look! Teacher's Books/Children's Books** is a program that uses adult-authored stories and stories written by children, plays, puppets, illustrations, dramatization, and poetry to expose children to a variety of literature and to develop their communication arts skills.

While this program can be implemented without the help of parents, I find parents to be of great assistance. Parents can:

- Help take dictation from those children who are not yet ready to write freely or who are unable to express their thoughts in writing without assistance.
- Serve as editors and help children to rewrite their stories for display or for others to read.
- Assist children in binding their books and in making covers. Parents can also assist students in making big books for use in the classroom and the school library.
- Monitor activities that are going on as the teacher is working with individuals or small groups of children.
- Help make puppets, find pictures in magazines, and organize pages and pictures into books.
- Read aloud to the class. This provides variety for the children and lets them see other adults as role models.
- Go on field trips with the class to the neighborhood library, perhaps for story hour. Parents can also contribute books to a class library and help to run it.

Not only does this program foster the children's competency in reading and writing, interest in books, comprehension and phonics skills, and active language use, but it also provides an opportunity for their parents to be actively involved in the classroom in a meaningful way.

2 I teach **Well-Being Through Yoga** to high school students. Each term, I answer many questions from students who wish to teach the techniques to their parents. During open school night, I meet many parents who are interested in what is going on in the class and who would like to practice yoga with their children at home. I once had a student bring me a blank tape and ask me to do the relaxation part of the class on tape so that she could bring it home for the family.

I am very much aware of the negative and positive stress that students, parents, and teachers experience. In class we talk about stress the students are experiencing and ways to deal with it. The relationship between mental attitudes and physical well-being is discussed. Students learn how to create tension in their bodies and then release it, so that the difference can be experienced. We learn how to empty our busy minds and focus on one mental image in the "mind's eye." These experiences help to create a peaceful atmosphere in the class.

Some parents have become involved in the class' weekly yoga meeting.

Some parents have become involved in the weekly yoga meetings of the class. They have learned the various postures and practice these asanas at home. Through yoga, new lines of communication have opened between the teacher, the parents, and the students. Parents are encouraged to keep the class going when school is not in session, for example, during vacations.

Another important topic in class is power. Students tend to feel powerless over their lives. In our class we learn how to have power over our minds and bodies and how to exert that power. It is helpful when students and parents have an opportunity to discuss issues of power and when they work together to enhance each other's sense of powerfulness and well-being.

On Behalf of the Working Parent

by Judith Menken

Dear Teachers,

For the moment, please put yourself in my shoes. Daily, somewhere around midafternoon, I invariably find myself distracted from my duties at work. My throat constricts as I wonder if my neighbor's friend's cousin remembered to pick up my child from school and transport her across town to the after-school center. The sun shone brightly at 8:00 a.m. when we left home, but now it is snowing with gale force winds. Of course, I dressed my child in sneakers today, and we forgot her hat!

At 5:00 p.m. there is a "short delay" in the trains; the seconds tick by, echoing through me as I run the four-minute mile those last blocks to the center. Don't let my child be the last to be claimed — again!

I pick up fast food supper on the way home, but the clerk fails to double bag it and by now it's raining out. The sauce leaks and the fries fall through the bag when I am only three steps from the front door.

In the middle of her bath, my child announces she must make a dinosaur sock puppet by tomorrow. She had gotten the assignment four days ago, but the paper fell out the bus window and she forgot to tell me.

I need help with that dreaded "H" word — Homework!

Signed,

Exhausted

The Working Parent

Those of you who have juggled your own teaching career and the master's course your district requires with karate lessons and violin auditions, you're nodding your head by now. If you were one of those parents who was able to leisurely pick up your child at 3:00 p.m., taking him or her home for freshly made cookies and milk each day, don't bother with this essay. As a matter of fact, you should have already been stuffed and displayed — you're part of a nearly extinct species!

But if this hypothetical day seems only too familiar, then read on. The parents of our children are nearly all working outside the home, many of them tackling the additional job of raising their children in single-parent homes. This certainly is not news to you. But as a woman who writes lesson plans each Saturday afternoon while sitting in the unheated hallway outside her daughter's gym class, I cannot help keeping that situation in mind when formulating how I will integrate my parents into the classroom agenda.

This is not the forum for a lengthy discussion on the desirability and effectiveness of formal skills homework in the early grades. Those magazine-clipping, worksheet-completing chores that fill many a young child's evenings may not be best serving that child, or the parent trying to spend quality time with his or her youngster before bedtime. I would like to offer alternative approaches to traditional homework tasks that involve parents in the school lives of their children.

Parents want to feel connected to the education of their child. At the same time, the "assignments" must have meaning for the child in the context of the class curriculum. I do not believe that requiring a five-year-old to write a page of "Ps" and then color pink and purple all the pretty parrots, pigs, and pumpkins meets those criteria. For the past eight years, I have sent home weekly homework activities that come directly out of the themes and skills the children are engaged in at school. The activities are meant to be done with the parent, and in fact, often center around the routine activities that the parent will be busy with anyway in the evening. For example, in keeping with developing number sense and one-to-one correspondence, typical activities could be the following:

Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook Order Form

Yes, I am interested in ordering additional copies of the **Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook**. The cost for each copy is $9.50 plus $1.50 for shipping/handling. 25 or more copies to the same address, paid by a single check, 10% discount.

I enclose $ _____ for _____ copies.

Please ship to:

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

☐ Please send me additional information about other IMPACT II publications, audio cassettes, film, and videotapes.

Information Request and Order Data

Yes, I am interested in the following:

☐ Order form for additional copies of the **Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook**.

☐ Order form for the **New Teachers Handbook**, a how-to publication for teachers who want to learn more about classroom-proven techniques that cover the everyday challenge of teaching today.

☐ Order form for the **Teachers Catalog of Creative Program Ideas**, which contains 100 easy-to-adapt program ideas developed by teachers.

☐ A sample of the **IMPACT II Star****, a newsletter featuring successful teacher-developed programs and national networking activities.

Mail to:

Name _____

School _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Information Request and Order Data

Yes, I am interested in the following:

☐ Order form for additional copies of the **Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook**.

☐ Order form for the **New Teachers Handbook**, a how-to publication for teachers who want to learn more about classroom-proven techniques that cover the everyday challenge of teaching today.

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☐ A sample of the **IMPACT II Star****, a newsletter featuring successful teacher-developed programs and national networking activities.

Mail to:

Name _____

School _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Use this form to order additional copies of the **Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook**.

Please complete this form.

Include the correct amount on check or money order made payable to IMPACT II.

Place this form and your payment in an envelope, and mail to:

IMPACT II, P.O. Box 577, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013-0577

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New York, NY 10013-0577

- Count how many people are having dinner. _____ Set that many plates. Set that many cups, napkins, and forks.
- What floor do you live on? _____ Is that number greater or less than the number of your age? _____
- Write your name here. _____ Write a friend's name on this line: _____ Circle the name that has more letters in it.
- Fold the socks in the laundry this week. How many matched sets do you have? _____ Sort them by color. Have someone at home help you fill in this chart:

Color	*How Many?*

Color	*How Many?*

Which color was the most popular? _____ **Which was the least?** _____

There is an endless number of science tasks that can take place in the bathtub; bedtime stories are perfect for language development and comprehension activities, for example:

- Choose three fairy tales to read at bedtime this week. Talk about who the good characters are in each. Is there anything the same in all three tales? Talk about why.

Parents have these kinds of interactions with their children all the time, but don't always give themselves enough credit for supplying quality educational lessons for the child.

"The parent is the child's first teacher" is one of the hot phrases being tossed about today. Despite the danger of its message being watered down from overuse, it's worth hearing again. Not only is the parent where it starts, but he or she is where all roads meet for the child; the parent is the pivotal agent in connecting the "work" of the day to the child's life. Therefore, the time parents spend with their children at the end of their overbooked days should be focused on synthesizing the input the child received during the school day into his or her existing world. Homework tasks like the following achieve this goal:

- Tell someone at home about an activity you are going to try for the first time this week.
- Tell three people at home about our new class pet. Take a good look at it in class, so that you will be able to describe it and answer all of their questions.

Assignments of this type also make it easier for parents when they ask, "What did you do in school today?" Now parents have clues with which to formulate their questions, and their children have the opportunity to articulate thoughts, develop vocabulary, relate sequences and details, and most important, find a place for their personal experiences within the larger framework of their family life.

I use the weekly homework sheets as a vehicle with which to communicate with parents as well. They go home every Monday. Any notices the school or I have for parents are attached. The sheets are due back, signed by the parent, the following Monday. Children who return the sheets get a sticker. There is no negative mark for the child who doesn't return a sheet. I approach the weekly activities as enrichment and keep in mind that a child is subject to whatever schedule the adults at home set up. Often a child will hand in three sheets at once, receiving all three stickers then.

Life is very complicated and often quite difficult for the parents of our children. I have found that using homework directed to the adult and child as a team has worked to guide parents in understanding how concepts are presented in school, in knowing what their children are spending time on, and in structuring the precious time they have to spend with their children.

4 Homework . . . A Teacher, Student, Parent Cooperative Plan

Are you tired of hearing the same old excuses for homework not done? Do you find empty spaces in your record book where assignment grades should be? Do you spend a large percentage of your class time cajoling, encouraging, or demanding that students turn in homework? Do some of the students fail because of uncompleted homework assignments? If so, a homework plan that involves the students, their parents, and the teacher in a cooperative effort may be what you need.

Your first objective is to put students in the right "mind set" about homework. You might start with a brainstorming/discussion session on why completing homework is important. Allow the students to suggest reasons such as, "So I won't flunk," or "So I won't get a detention." Then try to get them to adopt a more positive, creative outlook. Ask them to visualize expanding their brains as they load in knowledge. Talk about the respect an educated person receives and the additional opportunities available to those who are educated. Encourage the students not to get "bored." Explain that boredom is a state of mind they can control and that a creative mind can take a "boring" situation and find interest in it. Talk about ways this can be done.

After the brainstorming session, talk about a structured approach to doing homework. You might pass out a set of homework rules which the students read and discuss. (See Homework Rules, page 38.) You might also show them examples of assignment books and ask that each student keep one. If students cannot purchase their own assignment books, issue them composition books or help them to design a homework sheet that includes school subjects and blanks for assignments. Let them know you care but expect them to take responsibility for recording and completing assignments. Work with them until they are successful, checking periodically to be sure they are filling in assignments.

The next step is to involve parents. Send home the homework rules with a note asking that they enforce them. The response is likely to be very positive. When parents know what is expected, they often prove to be excellent allies. You can include a copy of the form you intend to use to alert them when homework is not completed, an example of an assignment sheet, and perhaps a contract that both parent and child sign promising diligent attention to homework.

When the homework comes in, make it a point to correct and get the papers back to the students as soon as possible. You will find that a majority of the students will do an adequate or superior job when they know that their work will be graded and/or looked at every time. Knowing that their parents will also be asking about the assignment adds even more motivation to do a good job.

Another technique which adds variety, reduces your workload, and makes students feel that they are an important part of a team, is letting the students take turns creating homework assignments and even tests for their classmates. The creator should present his or her activity to the class, give assistance where needed, and help grade the work when done. Although mistakes may be made, you can use them to discuss trouble spots, thus preparing the class for further mastery.

Many book companies now include parent/student activity sheets in their textbooks and teacher manuals. Use them or design your own. For example, a math activity sheet might be called "Let's Go Grocery Shopping," and might require parents and children to complete it together while food shopping.

If you find that a few children are not responding to your homework plan, try making them responsible for getting your signature on their assignment books each day and their parents' initials on completed work each night. Pretty soon these children will realize that people really care whether or not their work gets done, and they are likely to apply themselves more.

Although a cooperative homework plan may at first seem like "too much trouble," the benefits will almost certainly make it all worthwhile. Not only will you have more time to teach, you will also have more successful students, much more cooperation, and the support of both students and parents. You may even find that your life as a teacher is more enjoyable once the children know you care. As an added bonus, when the children perceive that their teachers and parents are working together to help them build

Let's Go Grocery Shopping

Dear Parents,

Let's face it . . . time is one resource we never seem to have enough of, so we all strive to make the most of what we have. Here are a few activities that can be used to integrate basic math skills with that time-consuming chore of grocery shopping. Not only can you get your shopping done without the familiar, "Mom, can we get this?" or "Dad, can I have a quarter for the junk machine?"—you can also spend some quality time with your child as he or she estimates the total cost of your grocery bill, deciphers the unit pricing system to choose the better buy, or uses coupons to reduce the price of an item.

ACTIVITY #1

Estimate the total cost of a grocery order when shopping with your parent(s). Round prices to the nearest 10¢ or $1.00. Example: 1 head of lettuce cost 69¢ (70) plus one can of corn costs 29¢ (30) = $1.00. Write down the final estimation before the groceries are totaled on the cash register. Attach your total to the receipt from the store, and bring to class for extra credit. Repeat activity weekly until your estimations are very close to the final total.

ACTIVITY #2

Use the unit pricing guide on the shelves of the store to determine the better buy. These guides help consumers to compare the prices per ounce, pound, liter, or whatever unit is applicable. For example: Which is the better buy, a 16-ounce loaf of bread for 96¢ or a 25-ounce loaf of bread for $1.20? Divide the number of ounces into the price to find out. The unit price stickers should show that the 16-ounce loaf costs 6¢ per ounce and the 24-ounce loaf cost 5¢ per ounce, the second being the better buy. Do four or five comparisons, and then turn them in for extra credit.

ACTIVITY #3

Study the grocery list before shopping with your parent(s). Then choose appropriate coupons from newspapers, magazines, or a coupon file to match items on the list. Help your parent(s) find the items, and keep track of the money saved by subtracting the value of the coupon from the cost of the item. Then add up the individual savings for a grand total. Examples: 1 carton of ice cream at $1.99 – 25¢ (50¢ if you have a double coupon) = $1.74 or $1.49. Turn in amounts saved for extra credit.

ACTIVITY #4 Bonus!!

Take an advertising circular from a local grocery store and plan a week's worth of groceries for the family, using items "on sale" for that week. Check with your parent(s) for approval, total up the amount to be spent, subtract any coupon items, and then carry out the grocery shopping with your parent(s) as advisor. Bring the list and receipt to class for three extra-credit points. Hint: If possible, arrange items by groups (all vegetable, all dairy, etc.) or by aisles in the store.

Have fun!

Melanie Rogers

skills, they will be more secure in their quest to learn what they need to learn today, so that they can face the world tomorrow.

Pointers for Parents

It is important to let parents know that they can make a big difference in the success of their children in school by helping with homework. Just listening, reading, or talking with children seems to improve their academic achievement. Some children need a bit more structure and "tutoring." Here is a list of pointers which parents can follow to positively affect the way their children view homework and school. These techniques work best if they are used in a noncritical, supportive, and caring way.

- If possible, set aside a specific time each day for homework. Tell your child that homework is a number one priority, and help him or her to get into the habit of doing homework at a regular time. Be flexible, however. If soccer practice or band tryouts happen to fall during homework time, talk to your child and set a new time for that day.
- Don't do your child's homework, but let him or her know you are available for help. Answer questions, quiz your child on material, or act as a "consultant." If you sense that your child is asking for help because he or she wants someone else to do the thinking, don't hesitate to say, "I think you can figure this out on your own. Try."
- When your child is studying for a test, discourage "cramming" the night before. Instead, ask your child to bring a textbook home every other night and teach you what he or she has learned in school. These discussions can be held at the dinner table for the benefit of everyone. As your child nears the end of a chapter, have him or her use the chapter review questions to quiz you. These review questions can also be put on flashcards with the answers on the back.
- Encourage your child to take notes about important information

Dear Parents,

Some parents have inquired about homework. I suggest reading a story to your child. One of the most enriching experiences your child can have is to listen to a story read by you. The children all love stories read to them, and that "good feeling" about books will have a profound effect on their success in school.

I try to nurture that "good feeling" about reading and writing daily. The children and I have just completed a story we wrote as a group. They will make masks for the story, and each will play a character. I will photograph them while they act out the story and use the pictures as illustrations for their book. I will make copies of the book for each child to take home.

Another excellent homework assignment is having your child watch *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers. Sesame Street* offers all those reading/writing/oral language readiness skills in an educationally sound approach. *Mr. Rogers* speaks to the children's inner needs.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call to schedule a conference or a classroom visit with me. I am looking forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Margarita Mindino

Margarita Mindino

in class. Most teachers stress what is important, and you can use these notes to make up review questions.

- If your child is a procrastinator and seems to do everything but homework, set up a time limit for completing work or a reward system. Let your child take homework breaks every 30 minutes to refresh his or her mind.
- Look for homework every night, but don't assume your child is "goofing-off" if he or she doesn't have any. Some teachers don't give homework every night.
- Plan a reading time for you and your child. Let your child choose at least some of what is read. Take turns reading out loud to each other. Studies show that the reading skills of early elementary students improve as a result of being read to by an adult. Discuss the stories and help your child to understand the meaning of new words.
- When reading to your child, especially a young child, encourage him or her to draw or scribble what he or she hears. This visualization enhances understanding and develops thinking skills.
- Encourage your child to write. Discuss ideas for stories, let him or her write them, and then help edit for spelling, punctuation, and content.
- When helping your child with math, use physical objects and pictures to help him or her understand. The traditional "flash card" method can be used anytime, anywhere. Keep a pack handy. For helping in science, look for experiments in library science books that you can conduct at home.
- When studying social studies together, relate what your child is learning to events in real life, especially events with which he or she is familiar. When discussing a country or state, point out the location on a map or globe.
- A tape recorder is a great study aid for children whose parents are short on time. You or your child can record a definition or question on the tape, pause for about five seconds, and then record the answer. For example, "An animal whose body temperature adjusts to external temperatures is called _____." When the tape is played, your child will be given the chance to test his or her knowledge and get immediate feedback.
- When homework is completed, ask your child to tell about what he or she has done. Teaching you will help your child remember what has been learned.
- When your child is preparing for an exam, help him or her not to panic. Help the child to get started in order to begin to build confidence, so that he or she can finish on his or her own. Advise your child to study one section at a time. Also, encourage him or her to get a good night's sleep and to eat a nutritious meal before taking the test. If the test is in the afternoon, include an extra snack of something like peanuts or cheese in the child's lunch.
- If your child is having trouble with an assignment, be careful not to criticize. Find out what the problem is and try to help solve it.

Remember, your positive attitude toward homework, teachers, and school can have great influence on your child's success.

Setting Up a Home Study Area

Although students often think that they can do their homework in front of the TV, while listening to "heavy metal" rock music, or in the middle of the kitchen or family room, most teachers observe that students learn more, make fewer mistakes, and have neater papers when they aren't distracted by what's going on around them. You should share this observation with parents. They want the best for their children, and in this case, the best is in easy reach. Suggest that parents set up a home study area that is conducive to real learning.

Below are some guidelines that you can provide for parents.

- Together, design and set up a homework "office" for your child. Any quiet corner will do. Tell him or her that doing homework is like doing paperwork in a real job. To succeed, he or she must do a thorough and neat job. You can also explain that some of his or her talents, skills, and intelligence may not be recognized if they are not displayed in his or her assignments.
- Provide a quiet, well-lit, and comfortable area that is free of distractions. Eliminate window views, TV, toys, and music, if possible.

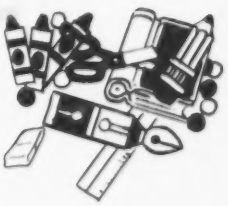
Photo credits: Beryl Goldberg © 1989

When you're about to study –
Look for a special place.

- Having materials such as paper, pencils, pens, crayons, markers, white-out, a ruler, a protractor, and a calculator in the study area is helpful, as children don't have to waste time searching for them. Inexpensive plastic baskets make ideal containers.

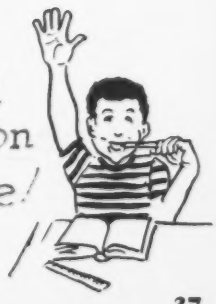
Illustration credits: Tom Laidman/Barbara A. Ellis

Get all your tools and stuff ready -



- Make a set of reference materials available. Encyclopedias, a dictionary, a thesaurus, an atlas, and a globe are important. If you can't provide these materials, they can be found in the local library. It also helps to have newspapers and children's publications such as *Highlights*, *Ranger Rick*, or *National Geographic World* in the home.

and in school you'll soon be an ace!



Dear Parents:

Homework is a very important part of your child's education and is one of the areas on which we can work together. As a parent, I know how frustrating it can be not to know what your child is expected to do for homework. I hope the rules and guidelines which I have set up will give both you and your child success in completing assignments at home.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I appreciate your cooperation.

Hiram Rivera
Your Child's Teacher

HOMEWORK RULES:

1) Each student will need an assignment book in which he or she can write the daily assignments, including page numbers, worksheet numbers, special directions, due dates, and project directions. I will be glad to provide a notebook for your child if you would like.

2) The homework assigned will be due the next day, unless stated otherwise.

3) Homework should always be neat and legible.

4) Sometimes homework will be graded, so encourage your child to do his or her best each time.

5) Homework will always be checked.

6) If work is not completed, a "blue slip" will be issued noting the date and the unfinished assignment. These slips will need to be signed by you and returned. If your child accumulates four "blue slips," he or she will have to stay for a detention. The blue slip notices will be erased at the end of a marking period.

7) A student will be given extra time to complete assignments when he or she has been absent.

8) If your child receives a failing grade on a test or assignment and would like to take a make-up, have him or her see me.

9) If your child cannot complete his or her homework, and you feel the reason is valid, write me a note and I'll allow time to make it up.

10) If you find that your child needs more guidance or structure in order to complete homework assignments, an alternate program can be set up. The most popular system makes it a requirement for the student to get the teacher's signature on assigned work, and the parent's signature on completed work.

42

Contributing Teachers:
Charlotte Higuchi, Beth Larkins

1 The Homework Book

In teaching responsibility for homework to elementary school students, it takes an effort on the part of the students, the parents, and the teacher to establish a routine that works. After many years of trying both conventional and innovative approaches, I have found a tool that works well for all members of the communication triangle.

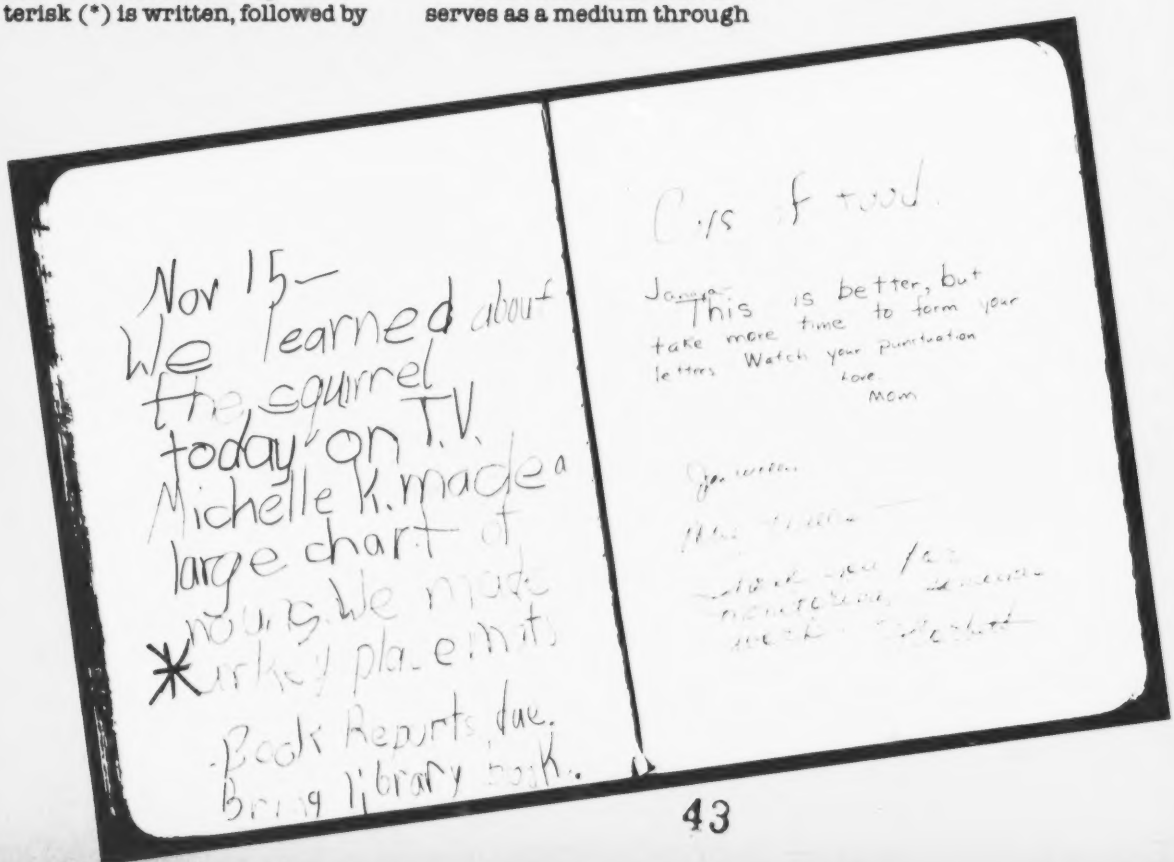
I use standard composition books (to discourage tearing-out of pages and for easy identification at home) to develop an ongoing, daily communication link between home and school.

Each day the student writes an entry in his or her book. The entry consists of the day's date and a short paragraph about what occurred in school that day. One line below the entry an asterisk (*) is written, followed by the homework assignment for that night. The student is required to do the homework right in the book (it is usually a 10- to 15-minute assignment), read the daily entry aloud to someone at home, have a parent initial the book, and bring the book to school the next morning to be checked.

Experience has shown that reading the entry at home generates further questions about what was done that day in school. Although normally the homework is a reinforcement of a skill being currently worked on in school, often the parent becomes involved in the night's assignment. In this way, interest and involvement in the child's education are generated.

The homework book also serves as a medium through which the parents can write to their child about his or her work in school, or just to say "Hi" and "I love you." The parents often write a note to me. Upon checking the books each morning, I answer the parents' queries or make a note to call them later in the day. Through this vital communication link, the parents experience daily involvement in their child's education.

Of all the methods I have used for developing responsibility in elementary-age students, consistency in their work habits, and good communication lines with their parents, this particular method has received consistently high marks from parents and students alike. "It works!"


Nov 15—
We learned about the squirrel today on T.V.
Michelle K. made a large chart of
*Book Reports due.
Bring library book.
C's of food.
This is better, but take more time to form your letters. Watch your punctuation
Love
Mom

Stinging Cells, Science, and Study Habits — The Family Learns Together

After exploring various methods of dealing with the challenge of helping students to develop good study habits and understanding of new materials, I believe I have found a dependable way to teach, whereby the student learns and retains successfully. My method involves the teacher as planner and the parent as reinforcer of the material the student needs to master.

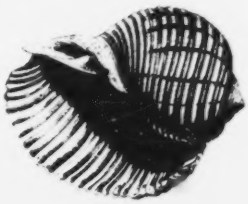
Initially, an overview of the new material is presented in an organized, structured manner, leaving creative thinking and exploration until later in the unit. An outline or chart is given as notes for the student to copy in his or her notebook. The outline is intended to be referred to as often as needed, until the student knows it from memory. Every lesson introduced thereafter must have a place in the overall outline that the student is able to identify.

As an illustration, let's take a lesson that examines the structure of "animals with stinging cells." Prior to teaching this lesson, a chart is provided to students to introduce the overall unit of which the lesson is a part.

The chart facilitates the student understanding that all animals fall into two structural groups: those lacking a backbone (invertebrates), and those having a backbone (vertebrates). This introduction is followed by a lesson on the first group, in particular the sponges, which are of the simplest order. The lesson on "animals with stinging cells" is now ready to be taught. Already the student knows that animals with stinging cells are invertebrates, that they follow the sponges in order of complexity, and that there are four more complex animals within the category of invertebrates.

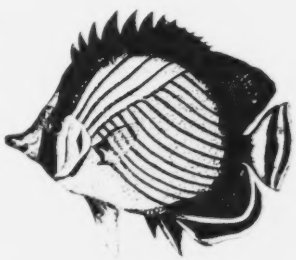
All Living Animals

INVERTEBRATES
(in order of complexity)



sponges
animals with stinging cells
worms
animals with spiny skins
animals with hard shells
animals with jointed legs

VERTEBRATES
(in order of complexity)



fish
amphibians
reptiles
birds
mammals

When the class lesson is completed, homework is assigned to reinforce the student's learning. The student is guided by the following procedures:

1. Read the assigned pages, always noting headings, subheadings, illustrations, and charts.
2. Answer the questions — but only if you understand them.
3. Upon finishing, lean back, relax, and review the questions and their answers. This is the most important step.

The learning experience, up to now, has been between the teacher and the student. The parents now become a more meaningful part of the process. The teacher initiates the parents' involvement by sending home a letter informing them of what the child will be studying over the next few weeks. The parents are also informed of all reports or projects that will be due, and are given suggestions on how to work with the student. The letter to parents might include an overview or chart of the unit, an estimate of the time to be spent on each task, a schedule of anticipated quizzes and unit tests, and a description of the assigned projects, with accompanying instructions and directions.

In the home letter, parents might be reminded that it is helpful when students receive assistance in doing homework and studying for tests. This reminder motivates parents to ask questions of their child that elicit how much or how little the student has understood and retained. The suggestions and rec-

commendations to parents vary according to the teacher's assessment of how much assistance the parents can provide. A suggestion to share learning with a child is always appropriate — for example, to look for invertebrates in a nearby pond, lake, woods, or even one's own backyard. Parents and children can examine what they find together, searching for the features of worms, crabs, spiders, and ants that are described in the textbook. This kind of sharing is helpful and creates a positive feeling about learning.

Study habits and organizational techniques that work are not developed easily. They are acquired only through consistent and persevering practice by the student, with the continued guidance and support of the teacher in school and the parent at home. There are auxiliary benefits to this collaboration — a feeling of mutual trust, and the creation of a positive learning environment in which the teacher, the student, and the parent can work together successfully.

Beryl Goldberg © 1989

"A suggestion to share learning is always appropriate—for example, to look for invertebrates in a nearby pond, lake, woods, or even one's own backyard."

5 Integrating the School into the Community and Involving Parents in the School

Positive attitudes and effective communication are both necessary in order to integrate the school into the community and involve parents in the school. Trust, respect, and cooperation between parents, the school, and the community help to create a healthy, productive environment where children can learn effectively. Being encouraged to help can be very rewarding to parents and other community members, who in turn become a great asset to the school.

Dear Parents:

Class 2-407 would like you to help us in our classroom. We need some volunteer parents to come in and help us write our stories, make our books, and come with us on trips. We have been working with the teacher, but we don't get enough things done because the teacher needs more help with us.

Please try to come in one time or two times a week. We need your help in our class.

We love you,

CLASS 2-407

Class 2-407

There are many ways to bring parents, the community, and the school together. Here are a few suggestions:

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1) Take a "Parent Survey" of parents throughout the school and the community. Find out about their different careers and job settings. Use the survey to set up "Career Awareness Groups" and to utilize specific talents and abilities of parents within the school. Sponsor "Career Days" during which parents participate in assembly programs, talk to students in small groups, or share their expertise with special classes. These exchanges will allow the children to explore possibilities for future careers.
2) Ask parents with specific skills to help out in classrooms, on planning committees, and on special projects. Whenever possible, request the help of parents in planning, writing, and typing newsletters and notices, or in completing other paperwork.
3) Plan conferences at a convenient time for parents. Engage responsible senior students to baby-sit with toddlers (although not with infants) while parents talk to teachers.
4) Take opinion polls that let parents express their ideas about issues involving the school. Also, place a suggestion box in a convenient location for the collection of ideas from parents and

other members of the community. Use these suggestions to get a deeper insight into the thoughts and feelings of parents and others.

5) Send home notices that carry a personal touch whenever possible. At least once a month, send home a notice that reads, "Dear (name of parent)." Important notices will be met with a greater response if personalized.

6) Invite parents to special assemblies and school activities. Encourage them to help with class plays and other special events.

7) Plan a breakfast, luncheon, dinner, or banquet for a special event involving the community. A "Thank You" affair to honor parents will be appreciated.

8) Provide enriching cultural experiences by planning outings for parents and children to places of interest. For example, arrange a picnic in a local park or a trip to a nearby museum.

9) Plan and celebrate "Parent's Day" at school. Let parents teach the class for half the day and culminate the activities with refreshments.

10) Organize a task force of teachers and parents that meets with community leaders and plans clean-up campaigns, food services, or other social service involvement within the community.

11) Ask parents who have been carefully screened to help with playground security by keeping the children in and outsiders out. Specific guidelines must be established before implementing this idea.

12) Set up programs of sports, special games, and other activities to be conducted after school by interested school personnel and community volunteers.

13) Take selected classes and parent volunteers to hospitals, shelters, and homes for the elderly where they can visit, read stories, and help in other ways.

Dear Parents,

Because we want your children to have the richest learning experience possible this year, we invite you, other adult members of your family, and your friends in the community to contribute whatever time and talents you can offer to enhance school activities. Your hobbies and work skills, your memories of important events, and your unique experiences are resources we can use, but only if you are kind enough to tell us about them.

Please fill out the survey below and return it with your child. Use the other side of this sheet, or additional paper if necessary. Note that when we have received your completed survey form, we will ask only for as much of your time, if any, as you feel you can give. Thank you for your cooperation; together, we will give our boys and girls a wonderful, "learningful" year!

Sincerely yours,

Mr. Ingerson

Mr. Ingerson

Sample Survey

Parent's Name: _____ Child's Name: _____

Languages Spoken: _____

Hobbies: _____

Job (e.g., auto mechanic): _____

Special Talents or Interests (e.g., sewing, juggling): _____

_____

Names of other adult relatives or friends who have special skills, memories, equipment, time, materials to share:

Ex: Rose Scala, grandmother

1. _____ 2. _____

Description of skills, talents, memories, equipment, time, materials which might be shared:

Ex: Does embroidery, speaks Italian and English, has doll collection and portable sewing machine, may be able to tutor in classroom and can go on some trips.

_____

_____

_____

Resources and resource persons you have found to be especially helpful to you or your children:

Ex: Highlights Magazine; Ms. Florence Parker, local branch librarian; Mr. Garth Fogarty, cub scout leader:

_____

_____

Please note phone numbers and times when we may call you to discuss ways in which we can work together.

Phone Number: _____ Other Phone Number: _____

Best Times to Call: _____ Best Times to Call: _____

Other Comments: _____

_____

_____

Note to the teacher: There may be service agencies in your area which can provide you with translations of your introductory note and survey. For example, Asian American Communications (Teachers College, Columbia University, Box 49, 525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027) prepared Chinese and Korean translations of the survey you see here for our parents.

Linking the Home, the School, and the Community

It all begins when a child asks why,
And then what, and how, and when.
And after a parent responds,
It starts all over again.

Darlissa Ritter, Teacher

Parents are every child's main source of information before the years of schooling begin. A conscious effort should be made by teachers and administrators to maintain parents in this role, rather than to isolate them from the educational process. If students observe that their teachers know, respect, and rely upon their parents to carry out the designs of the curriculum, they will be more intent on grasping what both the teacher and the parents have to offer. There will be less likelihood of discipline problems and disinterestedness, because the parents are directly involved in the school and are known entities to all parties concerned.

One way that parents can encourage and direct their children, so that they have the desire and discipline to carry out their studies, is by assisting them with homework. In addition to helping their own children at home, parents might take turns supervising group work in libraries, museums, at one another's home, and in other possible educational environments. Another way that teachers can use parents in the homework process is to suggest that they take turns playing the role of homework telephone consultant. Each week a different parent takes calls or advises his or her child on how to answer questions for those who call.

Sharing cultural heritages is another way to bring school, home, and community closer together. It seems that in our modern society, with all of its advancements and conveniences, we are losing our appreciation for the knowledge and skills that our parents and grandparents possess. We often instill in our children, however inadvertently, the idea that nothing is as good as "store bought" or "pre-fab" items. Yet, in reality, there is a wealth of information in our own backyards, so to speak, on which we should capitalize for the sake of our children.

Many of our students' parents or grandparents could share information with the class about important people, interesting events, and places of historical significance. Many students have parents or grandparents who have a working knowledge of skills such as carpentry, brick making, spinning, weaving, sewing, knitting, quilt making, and crocheting. These people should be invited to share their knowledge with the class.

Food is another reflection of our cultural heritage. How many students today know how to make nourishing foods from scratch? How many know how wheat or corn is ground into flour, or how butter is made? Students can acquire knowledge from many sources other than textbooks, and family and community members are an excellent alternative source.

"A lady in our area demonstrates to students the many varieties of plant and animal fibers available with which one can spin thread. She visits classes and demonstrates spinning methods such as the drop spindle, the Navajo spindle, and the spinning wheel, while spinning thread from the wool or hair of a large variety of sheep, goats, and llamas, as well as from cotton and flax. What interesting and valuable information!"

Developing a Teacher-Parent Newsletter

A teacher-parent newsletter is certainly an approach to a partnership that shows much mutual concern, creativity, and constructive work toward common goals. Teachers might first compile a newsletter in which student writing is featured. Then in subsequent issues, parents might contribute columns, editorials, and other writing. Through this procedure, both parents and students participate together in the learning process. Both acquire the rewards that come with collaboration and a commitment to academics.

Newsletters not only give students and teachers a chance to show what they are accomplishing, they also keep parents informed. Classroom newsletters can be filled with school news, suggested activities, and brief descriptions of the subjects being taught. Student poems, stories, and artwork are always parent and student favorites.

Sending a newsletter home on a regular basis — perhaps once a month — helps parents know what's happening in the classroom. An additional means of encouraging home-school cooperation is to send parents articles that have been written especially for them and have been reproduced from various professional publications, including school magazines. Some topics of interest to parents include helping your child do better in school, reading activities to do together, tips for teacher-parent conferences, and family holiday activities.

Using the Mall and Other Public Places

Our community consists mostly of working class people and some professionals. There is no art museum in the area. While sports are highly visible in the community, art tends to be tucked away in classrooms.

One of our goals as art teachers has been to bring art awareness to the community. During a school year, we organize three art shows outside of the school. Parents are invited to every art show and reception. Local dignitaries are also sent invitations written by students.

The November "Art Is Elementary" show starts the year off by taking over the public library's walls, display cases, and tops of bookshelves. The librarian is contacted in June and arrangements are made for the fall. The librarian has been a great help with publicity. The first

Graham L. Johnson, courtesy of *The Advocate*.

In a community in Central New York State, where there are no art museums, students create their own—at the public library, local bank, or shopping mall. Some years they have a theme. Pictured above, students assemble an exhibit featuring kindness to animals. Funds raised in selling their sculptures were donated by the students to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Sunday in November is set aside for a reception for the artists and their parents. Our Parent-Teacher organization provides refreshments. The students are encouraged to bring their parents that day, or sometime during the month.

March is "Youth Art Month," and we are on the road again, taking over the local bank's walls. Again, parents are encouraged to stop in with their artists to see the work on view. Parents are notified by letter that their children's work will be at the bank for the month. The bank's president is happy to see March arrive, as deposits show an increase with the increase in visitors.

Our crowning achievement occurs in early spring (before soccer and baseball practice starts), when the district's art staff members combine their efforts to take over one entire end of a local shopping mall for a whole day (a Saturday).

Some years we have had a theme such as the Statue of Liberty. Funds were raised by selling artwork, and the money was donated to the restoration fund. Another year our theme was kindness to animals, and money raised went to the local animal shelter.

As with other shows, parents, local dignitaries, school board members, and school administrators are invited by written invitation. The general public is alerted by radio, television, and newspaper.

It is a long, weary, wonderful day; a day that the students and their parents look forward to all year. The show is well received by all, but it is the parents that make it a true success.

Parents are surprised and delighted by their children's talent. They seem to see their youngsters in a new light. To regard their child as a budding artist gives parents as much or more pride as watching that same child score a goal in sports. The children enjoy themselves, too. It is a pleasure to watch their happy faces as they show their artwork to their moms and dads.

Developing a Teacher-Parent Partnership Program

The most important part of any partnership is communication. In developing teacher-parent partnership programs, you must have your goals and program plans ready to present to the principal, fellow teachers, and the PTA. You will need:

- A program proposal
- An estimate of the number of pupils involved
- A time line of activities
- A list of required materials
- A proposed budget
- A plan for effective communication between school and home.

First discuss your plans with the principal. He or she may have expertise that will help you with schedules, budgets, funding, and communication with the staff and community. Then elicit support from others through vehicles such as faculty meetings, PTA meetings, special events for parents, and community flyers.

Once you have elicited teacher support for your partnership program — incorporating their suggestions (be flexible!) — it is time to include the parents. You will want parents to have an overview of your plan as well as knowledge of the goals and format for their participation in the partnership. Be clear and organized in your presentation of this information.

1) Notify potential parent volunteers of upcoming needs at the beginning of the school year through the PTA newsletter.
2) Present the program at a PTA meeting about a month before launching it. A parent coordinator would be an asset for signing up and scheduling parent volunteers.
3) Host a "parent coffee" to explain the program and enlist volunteers. See if the school librarian will help you by providing the library for the meeting and setting up the "goodies." Provide each parent with an outline of the program.

Inform the children of the upcoming program and its requirements about two weeks prior to the day it starts. Communicate via bulletin boards, other teachers, the librarian, morning announcements, and the school newspaper. After the program begins, provide weekly reports of children's accomplishments in the program, perhaps over the public address system as part of the special afternoon announcements.

About a week after the children complete the program, double-

Contributing Teachers:
Marilyn L. Dixon, Beth Larkins, Barbara K. Mabry, Kathryn Pepe, Sharon M. Pike, Dorothy Ricci, Darlissa Pivola-Ritter, Beth Smuckler, Doris E. Tariska, Nina Wasserman, Ann Wilbourn

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check your records and write out the names of all participating children, their teacher and/or grade or class, and the names of parent volunteers. Prepare a press release and call your local newspaper with the story. Ask if the paper will send a photographer. Then schedule an appropriate place for the picture taking.

To evaluate your success and your needs for the next year, assess the following:

- Positive and negative comments about the program
- Participation by the children, parents, and faculty members
- Material/financial needs
- Amount of time required
- Your own evaluation — what to repeat and what to revise

Sample Ideas for Partnership Programs

. Reading incentive programs
. Writing celebrations with local authors/illustrators
. Technology/science fairs
. Commmunity career awareness guest speakers
. Children's radio
..Video shows broadcasting neighborhood news and book talks

"The Role of a Class Parent — Underestimated, but Sheer Gold!"

Dear Room Mother,

So, you have decided to become my room mother! Thank you for the decision. I know it was a difficult one. You have your family to consider and the new job, and you have heard that the responsibilities are more than cupcakes and punch at Christmas time. You are a little uncertain about what that new teacher will ask you to do. Her class, you have heard, is a bit different — different, indeed! Strange things go on in there, you have heard, but the children seem to enjoy themselves and even talk about school long after it is over. Amazing! You summon your courage and volunteer your services.

Thank you! Thank you! You have no idea how much I need you and appreciate your offer of assistance, encouragement, and support. You have, in effect, stated that you want to be a part of my class. You want to see firsthand your son or daughter's learning experiences. You are willing to support me.

We meet at a PTA-sponsored tea for room parents and teachers. We are both nervous. We fasten our sticky name badges a bit hesitantly to our blouses, and with brave little smiles begin to scan the room for each other. I have no idea what you look like.

Little knots of people form as parents find their teachers. Good grief, I think, maybe she hasn't come. Suddenly you appear, a bit frazzled, nervous perhaps. You laugh, introduce yourself. Hurray, I think, a friend!

You tell me a few complimentary things about your child being in my class. You are glad that he is with me this year. He talks about me constantly. He is excited about school. Thank you. You have no idea what music that is to my ears. Teachers never tire of hearing that. It is the stuff from which our dreams are made. That feedback of joy and exuberance sustains us, invigorates us, and directs us year after year.

Now I talk about the year and how I will need you. In so many small ways, your support and eager help will enhance and facilitate all of my plans and strategies.

Yes, there will be little, but wonderful things. Thank you for the apple cider and munchkins at Halloween. Thanks for riding the school bus on all of our bumpy excursions, and for getting excited at the museums and intrigued with what the children were learning. Thank you for bringing up the rear on all of the lines and watching for strays and stragglers. Thank you especially for the bathroom detail, which you always managed with a smile.

You came to all of our special activities: plays, festivals, and celebrations. By assuming all of the little things, the important details, you freed me to "do my thing," to concentrate on the children, on their learning, their enthusiasm. You freed me to teach!

Yes, we celebrate learning in my class every chance we get, from our Ancient Roman party to our Renaissance revels! You learned to bring sneakers with you on those "special" days. Thanks for running after us and keeping up. Thanks for videotaping our dramas and pageants. What wonderful memories you have made possible!

You encouraged me, sustained me. I appreciate your help more than I can tell you. The year has been a success. The children have grown and are happy with themselves. New activities were attempted and have proved successful.

As my room mother, you have played a vital role in the year's success. Thank you for volunteering to help me. Yes, it has been more than punch and cookies. Thank you for having the courage to support me in my attempts at unique and different "learning strategies." You helped make everything special!

Sincerely,

Maria Jones

Your Child's Sixth-Grade Teacher

A Backward Glance Forward — A Teacher-Parent Partnership Curriculum Design

by Rose Reissman

My seventh graders and I were involved in review of the vice presidential debates of 1988. We had heard Bentsen tell Quayle: "I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy." One of the students startled me by asking, "John Kennedy and Jack Kennedy, were they two different Kennedys?" I directed the student, Eve, to interview her mom, who had been a child of the sixties, to get the answer. The next day a far more knowledgeable Eve shared her mother's factual response to the John/Jack confusion, as well as her mother's personal views that any shared ideological similarities between Quayle and Kennedy were almost nonexistent.

As the class and I listened to Eve's spirited explanation, I was impressed at how Eve's mother's testimony on this contemporary issue had engaged Eve's interest in the sixties' political scene. Our reading of textbook material which imparted similar factual data had not excited Eve nor her classmates. The response of the class to Eve's information, plus the requests I received from students to be allowed to interview their parents, prompted me to initiate the "Backward Glance, Forward Approach" method of teaching contemporary issues. This approach offers parents and teachers a partnership opportunity that enriches them as well as their students.

To implement this project in my language arts/history class, I first selected a key event in recent history — the day John F Kennedy was assassinated (November 22, 1963).

A Partnership Plan

1. Select a key event in recent history.
2. Have students generate a series of interview questions.
3. Write a note to parents soliciting their help.
4. Incorporate their responses into the project.
5. Invite parents to a forum.
6. Collect parent/student/teacher reflections.
7. Form a parent/teacher curriculum design group.
8. Plan future 'Backward Glance, Forward Approach' events.

I asked the students to generate a series of questions they might have about this event. They came up with the following questions they wanted to ask their parents about the event, which they realized had happened when many of their parents were the same age as they are now — 12:

- How old were you and where were you geographically when this event happened?
- How did you feel when you first heard about it or saw it televised?
- How did your family and/or friends react to it?
- What different responses were there among your family and friends?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about the way in which it affected your life personally?
- In what ways do you think it changed our nation's history?
- In what ways, if any, have your initial feelings about this event changed over time?

After reading selected texts, viewing a videotape of JFK's biography, and watching TV documentaries on the assassination, the students added these specific questions to the list:

- Who do you think killed John F Kennedy?
- How did you react to the news of Oswald's death, and its coverage on TV?
- What do you think about the death now?
- What are your reactions to JFK's affairs and other revelations about him that have come out over the years?

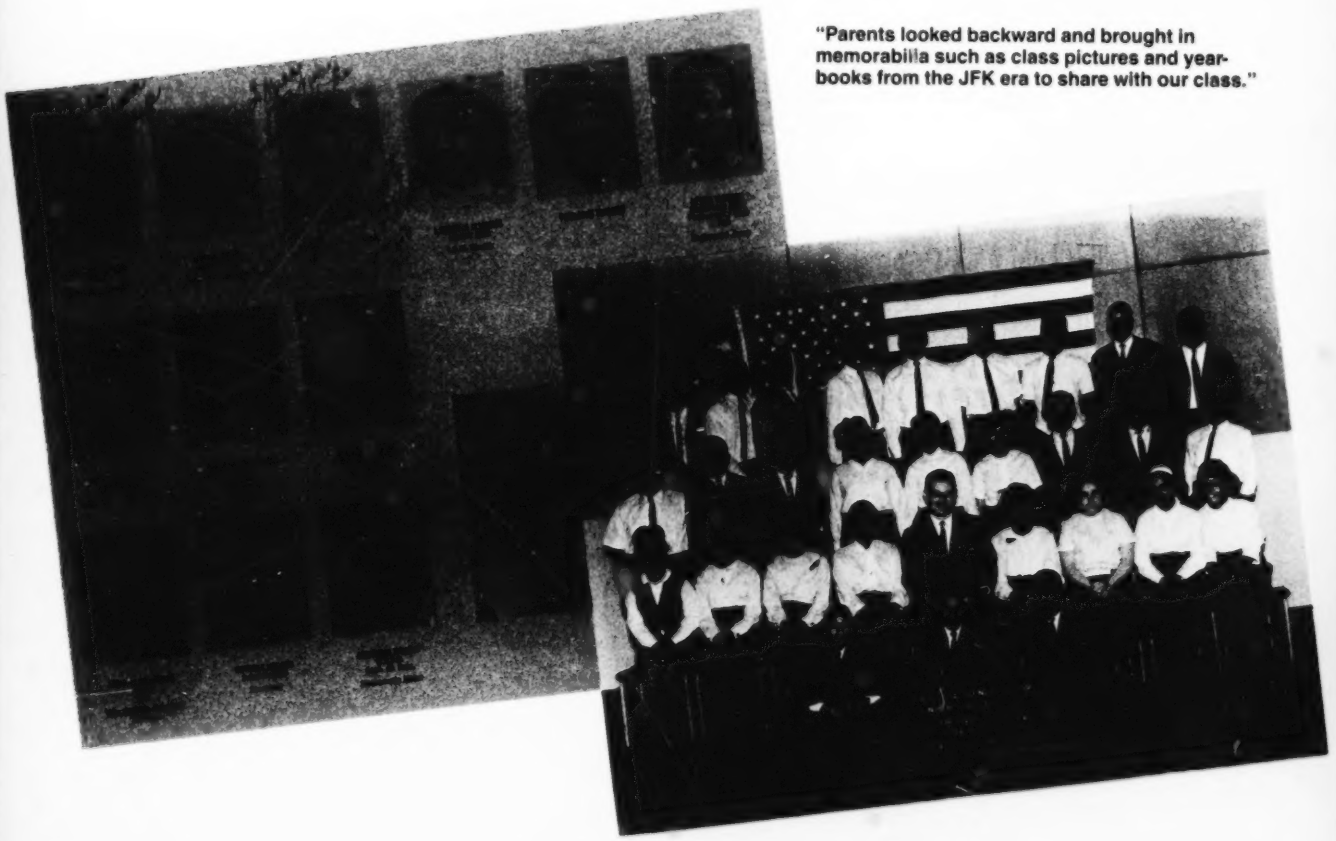
Once the students had developed their pilot questionnaire, which simply provided them with a framework for their interviews, we jointly drafted a note to the parents soliciting their assistance in our investigation of JFK. Parent response to our invitation for this school/family oral history collaboration transformed it into an unexpectedly rich adventure. Many parents sent notes or called to tell me that they had periodicals, photos, and memorabilia from the JFK era. Some shared

class pictures and autograph albums with their children; then, delighted by their own children's responses, they suggested that these items be incorporated into an artifact collection in school. One mother sent in jewelry from the sixties for the collection. A father, who was a professional photographer, donated photos he had taken of John and Robert Kennedy. The students and I found these photos to be a valuable visual "testimony" to the research we had done. We also spent a period poring over special issues of *Life* and *Look* magazines, which had been loaned by parents.

Our examination of these albums, photos, jewelry, and periodicals generated further student questions about: hippies, Elvis, drugs, Vietnam, nuclear protests, and Marilyn Monroe. The students added these questions to a lengthy list of topics they wanted to explore with a panel of "living witnesses" to the JFK assassination — their parents. Despite family, jobs, and community responsibilities, we conducted four panel discussions focusing on various aspects of the sixties, with parents as panel members. One parent's photo albums of the sixties stimulated a comparison of dress and behavior in junior high schools in the sixties and in the eighties. A parent took a morning off from work to tell us about the days when her mother worked for John F. Kennedy, while another displayed purses, campaign buttons, and placards from her days as a JFK enthusiast. One mother laughingly confessed to having been a hippie in the sixties and heard what our eighties savants thought that meant.

After the forum, both parents and students wrote about their reactions to the experience and about their insights into one another's thinking process. I then formed a committee of parent curriculum developers, and together we set up the following partnership experiences for "our" children: a sixties multimedia festival with multidisciplinary trivia bees; an artifact mini-Smithsonian exhibit curated by students and parents; a photo exhibit of both "family" and "event" photos; a Martin Luther King/ERA commemorative project paralleling our Kennedy experience; and a parent/child/teacher publication of our pilot JFK exploration.

Parents can help to make abstract issues and events concrete for their children by sharing their own memories of recent history. Together, parents and teachers can pilot powerful projects that serve as essential learning links for today's students.



"Parents looked backward and brought in memorabilia such as class pictures and yearbooks from the JFK era to share with our class."

6 Resources for Teachers and Parents

You, as a teacher, may wish to introduce parents to a variety of resources. You can do so at a "parent tea" or at a brief "classroom conference" during the first 15 minutes of Open School Night. Parents, as they enter the classroom, should see, among many other things, a display featuring resource materials that you have arranged attractively for perusal. These materials may include sample copies of books, magazines, children's theater and concert schedules, museum exhibition announcements, newsletters, brochures, and other items.

Members of your current parent group, including those who cannot attend the meeting, if approached in advance, may be willing to send a favorite book, or photos of a family trip to a nearby historic landmark. Something received from your own mother or father, or a book you have enjoyed with your own children, will add a personal touch. If you can obtain copies of books and magazines from the annotated list below, so much the better.

You can refer to items in general, make remarks about curriculum and expectations, and then invite parents to explore the "resource banquet" on their own (with one or two parents taking turns keeping the materials in order). Meanwhile, you hold private conferences with individual parents. Add a bowl of raisins and nuts beside a list where parents may suggest other resources they have found helpful. Voila! A warm and positive atmosphere and a sense of limitless potential are automatically established.

Teachers and parents cooperatively may generate a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers of local service agencies, clubs and recreational facilities, help hotlines, historic landmarks, and other cultural attractions. Often, a volunteer group, a nonprofit society, or a government office will have available for distribution a catalog of resources of a specific nature. For example, in New York, the Alliance for the Arts has published the *Kids Culture Catalog*, which may be obtained by writing to the Alliance for the Arts at 330 West 42nd Street, New York 10036, or calling them at (212) 947-6340. If such a catalog, detailing information about the programs of zoos, museums, performing groups, environment centers, and other educational institutions, does not exist in your area, you may want to work with a group of parents and other professionals to create one, perhaps using the *Kids Culture Catalog* as a model.

List of Suggested Resources

Some books that teachers highly recommend:

- *Classics to Read Aloud to Your Children and More Classics to Read Aloud to Your Children.* Russell, W. F. New York: Crown Publishers, 1984 and 1986.
- *The Arbuthnot Anthology of Children's Literature.* Arbuthnot, May Hill, ed. Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1971.
- *The World Treasury of Children's Literature.* Fadiman, Clifton, ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985.
- *Starting Right: Suzy Prudden's Fitness Program for Children 5-11.* Prudden, Suzy. New York: Doubleday, 1988. This volume describes exercises for children and illustrates them with excellent photographs. Included are tips on how parents and teachers can coach and motivate children, promoting general physical health and mastery of skills.
- *The Read-Aloud Handbook.* Trelease, Jim. New York: Penguin Books, 1985. This handbook highlights the importance of adults, especially parents and teachers, reading to children. It also features an extensive, annotated bibliography.

Magazines for children:

- *Cobblestone: The History Magazine for Young People* (Cobblestone Publishers) American history magazine with a special focus in each issue, e.g., Walt Whitman's life and poetry.
- *Cricket, the Magazine for Children* (Open Court Publishing Company) Primarily prose, fact and fiction, for elementary grades.
- *Highlights for Children* (Highlights for Children, Inc.) Puzzles, hidden pictures, stories, and cartoons for children in grades pre-K through 6.
- *Puppettools* (Prescott, Durrell and Company in Richmond, VA). Practical information intended to help young puppeteers and the adults who guide them.
- *Ranger Rick* (National Wildlife Federation) Factual information and superb photos of animals; suitable for all children and of interest to adults.
- *Stone Soup, the Magazine for Children* (Children's Art Foundation) Attrac-

tively presented prose and poetry written by children throughout the United States.

- *National Geographic World* (National Geographic Research) A geography and world cultures publication designed for children.

Professional materials for teachers and parents:

- *Big Book of Teacher Savers.* The Instructor Publications, Inc., 1980. This book includes a section of parent-contact letters intended for duplication.
- *A Calendar of Home-School Activities.* Brosnahan, JoAnne Patricia and Barbara Walters Milne. Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1979.
- *One Hundred Ways to Enhance Self-Concepts in the Classroom: A Handbook for Teachers and Parents.* Canfield, Jack and Harold C. Wells. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976.
- *Books and the Teenage Reader.* Carlsen, G. Robert. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.
- "Parents of High School Students: A Neglected Resource." *Education Digest*, no.4 (1988). Dornbusch, S. and P. Ritter.
- "Parents Who Can't Read: What Schools Can Do." *Education Digest*, no.4, (1988). Francie, M. and J. Meeks.
- *The School and Community Relations.* Kindred, Leslie, Don Bagin, and Donald R. Gallagher. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984.
- *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading.* Fifth Edition. Larrick, Nancy. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1983.
- *Effective Instructional Strategies for Exceptional Children.* Meyen, Edward L., et al. Denver: Love Publishing Company, 1988.
- *One Hundred and One Public Relations Activities for Schools.* Robinson, Thomas E. Danville: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1976.
- *The Learning Disabled Child: Round Holes, Square Pegs.* Lavoie, Richard D. Eagle Hill Outreach Project, 45 Glenville Road, Greenwich, CT 06830. (203) 622-9240. Send five dollars for a copy of this useful guide for parents.
- *Enhancing Parent Involvement in Schools: A Manual for Parents and Educators.* Swap, Susan. New York: Teachers College, 1984.

Organizations:

- **Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of America, 4-H Clubs, YWCA, YMCA, YWHA, YMHA,** and many other local groups offer recreational and educational programs, as well as some counseling and referral services.
- **The Rotary Club, the Junior League,** and other service groups or agencies may be helpful with referrals, guidance, advocacy, and fund-raising assistance.
- **The Center for the Study of Reading,** 51 Getty Drive, Champaign, IL 61820. This center publishes a useful pamphlet entitled "10 Ways to Help Your Children Become Better Readers."
- **The U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and the U.S. Government Printing Office** in Washington, D.C. offer listings of free and inexpensive publications.
- **National Public Radio** (consult local listings for programs like "The Children's Journal") and public television, especially productions of the **Children's Television Workshop**.
- **The National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE)** is a good source to pass along to parents. Their project ACCESS provides parents with counseling services and advises them of their rights regarding any problems they may have with the home-school relationship. This is a nonprofit organization founded in 1973; there is no charge for the help they offer at this number: 1-800-NETWORK (10-5 weekdays). A Spanish-speaking counselor is available for parents from 1-5 p.m. For a $10 fee, printouts from the ACCESS database of resources are available and contain much useful information on topics ranging from college opportunities for the learning disabled to single parents and the schools. The address of NCCE is 10840 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 301, Columbia, MD 21044.
- Available from the **International Reading Association** for $.50 each are eight small publications on parents and reading. Write to: IRA, 800 Barksdale Road, Newark, Delaware 19711. Ask for: No. 877 Why Read Aloud to Children? No. 872 What Books and Records Should I Get for my Preschooler? No. 870 What is Reading Readiness? No. 876 How Can I Help My Child Get Ready to Read? No. 875 How Can I Encourage My Primary Grade Child to Read? No. 874 How Can I Help My Child Read English as a Second Language? (Also available in Spanish) No. 873 How Does My Child's Vision Affect His Reading? No. 871 How Can I Get My Teenager to Read?
- For a list of **Reading is Fundamental (RIF)** publications for parents, write to: RIF Publications Department, P.O. Box 23444, Washington, D.C. 20026.
- **United Parents Associations of NYC, Inc.,** 70 Lafayette Street, New York, NY 10013. (212) 685-3563
- **The National PTA,** 700 North Rush Street, Chicago, IL 60611-2571. (312) 787-0977. You can request a copy of the *Parent Involvement Planning Kit.*
- **National School Volunteers Project,** 701 North Fairfax Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. (703) 836-4880. Write or call to request information about organizing new programs.

Various publications helpful to teachers and parents alike can be obtained by contacting:

- **American Federation of Teachers,** 555 New Jersey Avenue, Washington D.C. 20001. (202) 879-4400.
- **NEA Professional Library,** P.O. Box 509, West Haven, CT 06510.
- **Phi Delta Kappan,** P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402.
- **The Children's Book Council, Inc.,** 67 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. This nonprofit organization encourages the reading and enjoyment of children's books and sells informational material to the public.

Contributing Teachers:
Jan Cox Corbett, Barbara Ann Carter Ellis, Philip T. Freemer, David Rudolph Georgi, Barbara Longmire, Sharon M. Pike, Marie A. Prisco, Steven Schneider, Marylin Kurlan Sperling, Nina Wasserman

7 Developing Partnerships with Parents with Special Needs

Just as students have a wide variety of abilities, experiences, and needs, so do parents. As a group, parents speak a multitude of languages, have various educational backgrounds, and live in a wide range of economic conditions. Today, parents are often not a child's birth parents, but instead are stepparents, foster parents, grandparents, older siblings, or live-in friends acting as surrogate parents. The role of the teacher must be to work effectively with whoever is functioning as the parent.

Non-English-speaking parents are no different from any other parents in their desires. All parents want good things to come to their children. The key to establishing a viable relationship with a non-English-speaking parent is finding a means of communicating. One kindergarten teacher recalls discovering that one of her students did not understand any English. When she attempted to speak with the father, she ascertained that he also did not speak English. After numerous telephone calls, an interpreter was found, a caseworker was assigned, and the family enrolled in English classes. The father volunteered to assist in the classroom and was able to help his son practice at home the English words they had learned together in school.

Single parents often face the problem of too many responsibilities and not enough time. A teacher needs to be very specific about what is being asked of these parents, and needs to plan carefully a way in which they have a chance

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to succeed with a minimum involvement of time. When the teacher wishes to meet with a single parent, it should be kept in mind that the parent may need to bring younger children to the conference. The teacher may decide to make arrangements for someone to watch the children in another room, or may determine that a home visit would be more appropriate.

Working parents may need conferences scheduled before school or at night. Many parents cannot afford to miss work for a conference. They lead precarious economic lives, and a letter, phone call, or home visit after working hours may be necessary to establish a partnership without jeopardizing the family's well-being. Sometimes a parent's need for family survival must be addressed as part of the educational partnership. An observant teacher is often the first nonfamily member to be aware of a family's survival needs.

Cutting across the lines of varied backgrounds and living circumstances that may be represented by the parent population are the emotional needs that all parents bring to the teacher partnership setting. The overanxious parent of a gifted child may need reassurance from the teacher concerning the child's social development, just as the parent of an academically failing child needs reassurance that the child is learning, even if at a slower rate than the average student. The teacher, by meeting the parent's need for reassurance and by furnishing germane and helpful suggestions, is providing the child with adults who are supportive regardless of the child's abilities.

Parents of handicapped children sometimes have difficulty accepting the fact that their child is mentally handicapped, learning disabled, speech/language impaired, or physically disabled. It is not the teacher's responsibility to label the child or to delineate his or her limitations. The teacher's role is to help each child develop to his or her fullest potential. By equipping the parents with skills and strategies for assisting the child at home, the teacher may be providing the child with a support system that will last for years. With the assistance of an

understanding teacher, parents can learn to emphasize the child's strengths and help him or her compensate for weaknesses. Through a partnership between the parents and the teacher, a feeling of shared responsibility for the child's education grows.

Parents have many needs in common, and some have special needs that are unique. The teacher who can meet some of these needs will have extended the education of the child. Teachers who empower parents to become advocates of their child and their child's education will continue to contribute to the child's growth long after the school year has ended.

Developing Partnerships with Parents of Special Education Students

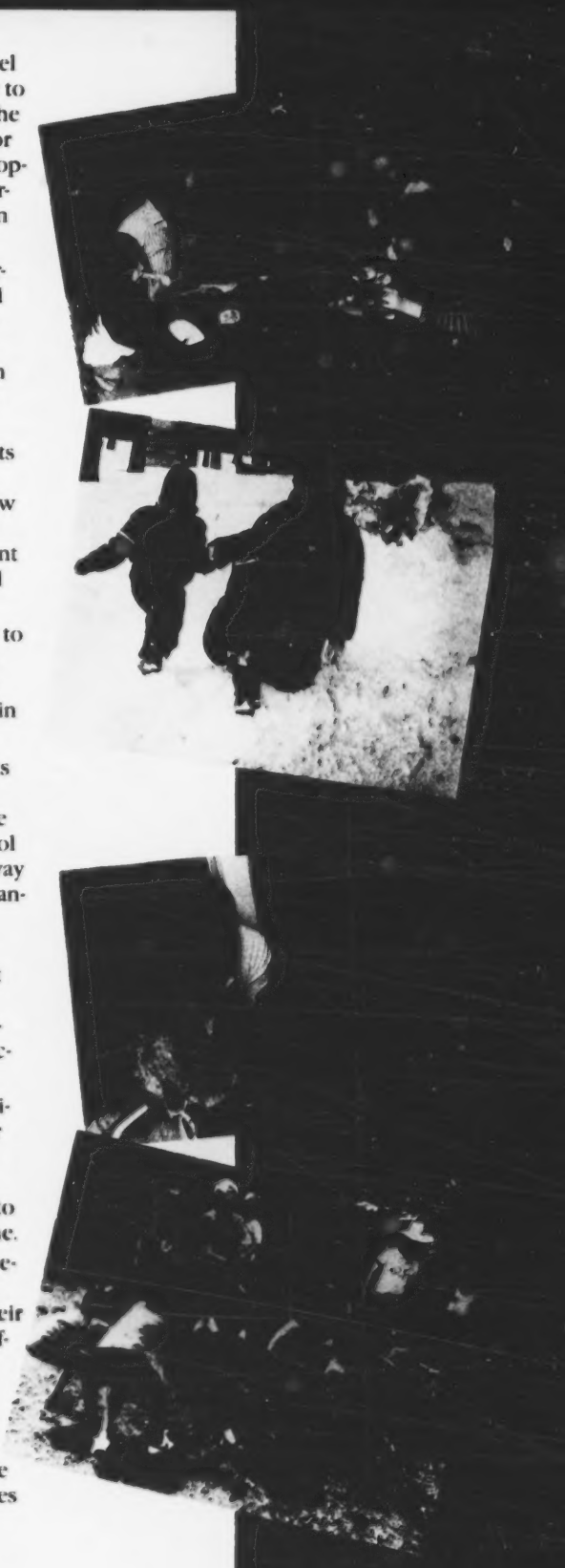
Teacher-parent communication is a must in the case of children requiring special education. Bonding must occur between the parents and the teachers if the child's special needs are truly to be met. Regular telephone calls discussing the child's "ups and downs" and mutual planning are invaluable.

"As a teacher of learning disabled children, I allow thirty minutes twice a week in the evening for telephone contacts with parents. This gives me information about what is happening in each child's life, ensures consistency, avoids student manipulation, and increases opportunities for both parties to vent frustration. What often results is an exchange of techniques for working with individual youngsters.

"I also communicate with parents through the written word in notes, achievement certificates, regular newsletters, and contracts. Summer postcards and birthday acknowledgments sent home are other vehicles I use to increase the self-esteem of my students."

Parents who feel respected, understood, and important in a partnership with the teacher will participate eagerly and intelligently in their child's education. Regular contact, get-acquainted time, facilitating questions, and active listening are all methods for inviting parents to feel respected, wanted, and necessary to the teacher-parent partnership. The following is a list of suggestions for the teacher to utilize in the development of a partnership with the parents of a child in special education classes:

1. Be sure that the parents understand their child's abilities and assets as well as his or her disabilities and deficiencies. Remember . . . what the child can do is far more important than what he or she cannot do.
2. Inform yourself and the parents about community resources. Give the parents advice on how to go about getting what they need. Steer them to local parent organizations and professional support facilities.
3. Help train the parent not only to think in positive terms, but to teach the other people important in the child's life to think in positive terms.
4. Communicate with the parents on a regular basis. Daily communication notebooks that the child carries to and from school every day create an efficient way to send messages and receive answers and information.
5. Parents can also be teachers. Communicate to parents what units/topics/skills are being taught each week, and encourage them to reinforce and practice the skills at home.
6. During conferences, communicate specific examples of their child's behaviors/accomplishments and model specific behaviors that the parents need to work on with the child at home.
7. Parents need positive reinforcement, too! Inform them when you see positive changes in their child's behavior which their efforts have helped to facilitate. Tell the parents that they are doing a great job, and to keep up the good work!
8. Send home pertinent literature found in professional magazines that offers suggestions for behavior/activities that can be utilized at home.



9. Answer any correspondence from parents immediately. This demonstrates to the parents that their comments and concerns are valued and deserve a prompt reply.
10. Establish a whole-family support group. Arrange for parents and their extended family to meet with you once a month to share in a recreational activity such as bowling, cooking, or arts and crafts. This allows time for the parents to observe how you interact with their child, and it gives you a chance to develop a special relationship with the family.
11. During interactions with parents, allow them time to "sound-off." Being the parents of a child requiring special education can often be frustrating, and speaking with someone who understands reassures the parents that their feelings are normal and can be worked through.
12. Keep the parents informed about any legislation regarding handicapped children, and remain alert to any changes that might be occurring in this area.

Children in special education will eventually be functioning as adults in a world that is a non-handicapped one. In order to ensure their success, we must communicate to parents that their children are "handi-capable."

Parents deserve all of the help that professionals can provide. No matter how much legislation is passed, all parents, especially those with special-needs children, will always be ultimately responsible for their children's welfare and nurturing. Educators can make a difference by developing effective partnerships with parents.

PTAs and Workshops for Parents of Special Education Students

An excellent approach for establishing appropriate channels of communication with parents of children enrolled in special education is to develop a parent-teacher organization that is separate from the regular PTA. The group should meet on a regular basis to discuss topics related to the special-needs population. Outside specialists can be invited to speak on relevant topics. Parents, teachers, administrators, related service staff, and community members should be invited to these gatherings. Once channels for communication are open, parents can share their special problems and concerns with other parents.

At the secondary level, school begins to prepare some students for the world of work. In many cases, vocational training is called for in order to help these students successfully make the transition from school to the work place. A realistic partnership must be developed between the teachers and the parents toward this end.

One way to establish this partnership is to invite parents to mini-workshops after school, or in the evenings, to discuss the ways in which vocational/life skills can be reinforced in the home. For example, if a program goal for a student is to improve work habits, then suggestions such as the following can be given for activities to be done at home:

1. Writing grocery lists
2. Using coupons
3. Opening bank accounts
4. Reading schedules (i.e., movie, bus, TV)
5. Using the telephone directory

Through applying what is learned in workshops, both parents and students will develop a better understanding of vocational/life skills training. They may also better appreciate how important survival skills are for individuals as they reach adulthood.

In the lives of children who require special education, the teacher who provides it is truly a significant force. In addition to developing academic mastery of the basic school curriculum, the special educator discharges the challenging task of molding behaviors, attitudes, morals, work habits, and social deportment. The special educator is like a key constantly engaged in the task of opening the locks of doors, locks personified by the role of the parents. In order for a door to open, the key must fit in the lock. Therefore the most critical step in helping the special education youngster to open a door to success is to develop a smooth, well-oiled, effective partnership with his or her parents as early as possible.

Developing Partnerships with Non-English-Speaking Parents

It is extremely important for teachers to provide many opportunities for non-English-speaking and bilingual parents to participate in classroom activities. These parents may be coping with new situations themselves. They may be trying to get around in a community that is different from that to which they are accustomed and where a language foreign to them is spoken. Added to this is their anxiety about how their children are adjusting to school and the community. Both the parents and their children may miss their homeland and feel alienated in the new environment. It is the challenging but crucial function of teachers to provide these parents with friendly and familiar frameworks within which to build new foundations. To accomplish this, teachers must find ways to communicate with the parents on an adult level, to assist them in helping their children. One concept to remember is that a smile and a warm handshake are the same in any language, and can be used as the basis for any communication.

"I am a resource room teacher in a large urban high school with a substantial number of recent immigrants. The barriers to teacher-parent partnerships are many. Parents may be passive in monitoring their children and in contacting teachers. The feeling that the teacher knows best is pervasive and may lead to a situation in which parents let the teacher do all the talking at open-school conferences. This also may stem from discomfort if the parent speaks little English, or lacks a high school education. Too, in other cultures it may be considered impolite to question the teacher who, after all, is the ex-

pert. A parent may feel she or he can't really contribute."

There are several ways in which teachers can provide atmospheres in which both parents and children can learn the language and customs together. Since both parties need to accomplish this, it is collaborative learning that proves most rewarding. Teachers must be careful not to appear condescending to parents as they attempt this approach. While the parents are profiting from the experience by acquiring survival knowledge, they have already been educated, and in many cases have worked in professional capacities. Thus, teachers must show a respect for their talents and experiences and utilize both in this method of learning.

A possible program might be one in which parents are pen pals to their children or other children in the class. In English, students would write letters to their parents — or to the parents polled as having interests similar to theirs. These letters would be corrected and given to the parents for responses. The responses, in turn, would be corrected and forwarded, as the cycle continues. The final result would be a journal of letters, or segments of letters, which might be used periodically in class publications. Topics might include current events in the world, cultural stories from native homelands, information needed in order to function in this society, feelings immigrants have as they adapt, and items appropriate to the curriculum being studied. Parents can impart their experiences, in careers, society, and other educational environments, thus providing the students with encouragement. Students will feel that there is yet another adult with whom to communicate and from whom to obtain help in solving their problems. This additional adult is even in the same situation as they are. Both are adapting to a new society and gaining practical information.

Teachers should give parents the opportunity to attend class sessions, take part in discussions, and assist students in ways in which they find themselves proficient. Teachers should give parent workshops in preparing materials which can be used for home instruction. In addition, parents should be provided with lists of resources and their offerings. Parents should be encouraged to go along on class trips to libraries, films, museums, and other locations in their surroundings. Teacher-parent partnerships involving non-English-speaking and bilingual populations can enhance the quality of everyone's education. Everyone can learn from each other, even the teachers themselves.

Developing Partnerships with Parents of Students At Risk — One Community's Approach

Practically every segment of our society is concerned about students who are at risk academically. The consensus is that the best means for resolving this dilemma is to involve parents. But, there is not a consensus on how or where to begin establishing parental involvement. Whatever the barriers are that cause parents of at-risk students not to be involved with their children's education, efforts must be made toward identifying them. After the barriers have been identified, then a mechanism needs to be put into place to remove them.

With the purpose in mind of reaching the parents of students at risk, the PTA board and school counselor at an elementary school in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, organized a PTA meeting to be held in the community of many of the school's at-risk youngsters.

Information to parents about the meeting was distributed through a flyer that was sent home with students. In addition to the flyer, parents of at-risk students received a memo through the mail. The memo was followed up with a telephone call encouraging parents to attend the meeting. These calls were made by classroom teachers, guidance counselors, and a parent volunteer.

On a Thursday evening in October, the school had its PTA meeting at a local church. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways to increase involvement of parents of at-risk students in their children's educational process. The title of the meeting was "Investing in Your Child's Education."

To accomplish the goals of the meeting, everyone met in a large group and then broke up into five smaller groups. The smaller groups were facilitated by classroom teachers and a parent volunteer. A week prior to the meeting, the facilitators had been briefed by a counselor. At the briefing, each facilitator had received a set of guidelines. Facilitators led the participants of the smaller groups in exploring the following topics:

A. Every parent's most memorable experience, positive or negative, concerning his or her child's education, or his or her own education.

B. Factors that contribute to some parents being more involved than others.

C. Strategies that would eliminate the factors that contribute to some parents being uninvolved.

The smaller groups met for 30 minutes before reconvening in the large group. At that time, each facilitator shared with the audience two factors and two strategies that his or her group had identified. The meeting was adjourned, followed by refreshments.

The event was very successful. Its success can be attributed to a total school commitment and community involvement. Approximately 60 people attended the meeting, with attendance evenly distributed among involved parents, targeted parents, and staff. Participants were relaxed and talked freely, and many commented on liking the small-group experience. As a way to maintain the positive relationship that was established at the meeting, each participant was sent a thank-you note by mail.

Contributing Teachers:
Mary Anne Drew, Susan Feldman, Margo Harris, Paula Hartman, Rochelle S. Kaplan, Kerri A. Lyons, Beth Smuckler

Integrated Theme Units

Involving parents is one of the goals of **Integrated Theme Units**, an interdisciplinary approach to speech/language therapy for learning-disabled students. The pattern of parent involvement established by this program can easily be adapted to the regular elementary or secondary classroom.

Our first step is to mail letters to parents in September introducing the unit approach and outlining how the family can become involved. The letter explains that as each new unit begins, the family will receive suggestions for theme-related home activities, including books to read, trips to take, ways to practice new vocabulary, and more. The letter "sets the stage" for a follow-up phone call. What seems to work best is to ask the family to help us by providing an object. Sending something to school makes the parents feel that they have become partners in the program, not just observers.

The second step is to send a letter that describes the theme of an individual unit, e.g., sports, space, cowboys and Native Americans. Sometimes this letter is included with the first letter. Several suggestions for dinner-table topics are listed, e.g., If you were to decorate the outside of your house as the Native Americans decorated their tepees, what designs would you use to express what is important to your family? The letter also outlines specific home activities that the student must complete in order to be eligible to go on the culminating field trip. These requirements have proven extremely effective in creating educational partnerships. The students "bug" their parents to do the activities because they don't want to be left out of the field trip. As the parents complete the activities, their own interest increases substantially, even the interest of parents who have not been noted for their cooperation with the school.

A separate mailing informs the parents of the formal objectives that the unit addresses. This mailing has become a valuable way to alert the parents to the pervasiveness of language demands on their children in school. Among other uses of language, our students learn rhyme, antonyms, sequencing, riddles, analogies, categorization, and association. Often parents comment that they had no idea their children were expected to use language in so many ways. For handicapped students, these objectives become part of their individualized educational program; this alert has been an effective means of making language goals understandable to parents.

As part of the unit approach, the students build a concrete object. Objects that have been constructed include a space ship, a cardboard house that matches the student's home, and a model of a specific sport's playing area. After an object is complete, each student makes a videotape in which he or she describes the object, explains how it was constructed, and often uses it as the subject of a story, or an expanded oral report. Families are invited to view these tapes during Parents Night by invitations individually designed on a computer by the students. Attendance at each unit's Parents Night has been very close to 100% for several years. The parents are as excited as the students to see the tapes and to join in the other activities, such as viewing the actual constructions, reading the students' written work, and looking through the classroom folders, which include work that their child has done for each objective.

Dear Parents,

Our cowboy and Native American unit is continuing with many different language activities. One of the students' favorites is creating, learning, and deciding how the directions for the Native American Stick Dice game should be written.

Each of your youngsters has made a pair of dice and has composed a set of directions to go with it. Your son or daughter can earn another feather for his or her Native American bonnet by playing the game with a member of your family. Please let your youngster teach it to you, play it, and then send the score sheet below back to school.

Thank you for your help; having you involved makes the school activities in language much more meaningful to your child.

Sincerely,

Vivian Schuster

Vivian Schuster

Student's Name: _____

Players' Names: _____

Score: _____

We played Native American Stick Dice on _____ .
Date

_____
Parent's Signature

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3. Summer Language Calendars

Summer Language Calendars is an easy, fun, inexpensive way to involve parents in activities that not only build students' language ability but also encourage parents with special needs to communicate with their children. The calendars were originally developed because many students with speech and language deficiencies who had made good progress during the school year regressed during summer vacation. Most of them were not severely enough impaired to be included in district-run summer school programs. In addition, many were from families in which both parents worked, and the youngsters had few educational experiences during the months of July and August. I felt that most of the parents wanted to help their children, but either did not know how or, after a long day at work, were too tired to think up activities.

The calendar package has four main parts: a letter outlining how parents can use the calendars, two reading contracts, two months of scheduled daily activities for each Monday through Saturday, and a strip of dots or stars.

The introductory letter encourages parents to relax and enjoy the activities with their child. It also includes a strip of dots or stars with instructions that each time the student completes an activity, he or she can place a dot or star on that calendar date.

Since one of the reasons for the summer calendars is to encourage parents to listen to or read to their youngster on a daily basis, the reading contract requires the student to agree to "read" a negotiated number of pages each month. In the letter, the parents are assured that it is not necessary for their child actually to read each book. Other options include having another member of the family read to the youngster, or having the child use the pictures in the book to tell the story to someone.

The range of activities in the calendars is wide, but they are all designed to require little if any advance preparation and a minimal number of craft supplies. One main category includes activities which help the parents become aware of how the home environment can be used for language stimulation. Examples of this are: Count the number of doors in the house, talk about the different types of

JULY — **Speech Activities Calendar**

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 Make a reading contract for July and check out some books at the library to get started.	2 Draw a big picture of an American flag.
4 Take a picture of (or draw) the room you decorate. Tape your flag to the front door. Happy July 4th!	5 Make some raisins (see recipe on the back of this sheet).	6 What kind of store would you go to buy salt, a wrench, French fries, shoes?	7 Find a picture in a magazine of a vehicle and tell a story about it.	8 Where in our town is there a mannequin dressed in a baseball uniform? Go there and then describe it.	9 Collect a quarter, dime, nickel, and penny. How much money do you have? What could you buy with it?
11 How many syllables are there in your mother's full name? In your grandmother's?	12 Free choice day.	13 Find and name five things in your house that are rough and five things that are smooth.	14 Ask Mom or Dad to show you how these work: gearshift, footbrake, emergency brake, lights, turn signal.	15 Make 40 dots all over a plain piece of paper. Then connect them to make a picture.	16 Close your eyes and describe the room you are in to a friend or family member.
18 How many doors are there in your home? Which room has the most? (Don't forget cabinets.)	19 What could you see, smell, hear, and taste at Marbel Farms? At a baseball game?	20 Ask one of your parents how your grandparents chose his or her name.	21 Go outside, close your eyes, and name eight things you can hear.	22 Find and name five things in your house that smell good.	23 Make a brick (see back of this sheet for directions).
25 Cookies! What is your favorite kind? Describe it. Then list 10 other kinds.	26 Cover your dried brick with fabric and use it as a doorstop.	27 Name five fun things to do in summer. Then do one of them.	28 Tell as many words as you can when you think of red. Now try yellow.	29 Finish reading one of your books and tell what happens in the story.	30 Visit a grocery store—choose a new food and try it.

doors (cupboard, garage, outside), and then name the room that has the most doors; decorate a room to celebrate Independence Day, and then discuss why July 4th is a holiday.

A second category includes those activities which stress the neighborhood. For example, tell in what kind of store you would buy each of these: salt, a wrench, French fries, shoes.

Another type of activity requires the student to create something; for example, put 40 dots all over a plain piece of paper and connect them to make a picture; or, What happens when you mix ice cream and chocolate syrup together with a mixer? Do it!

Each calendar also includes activities that involve discussions with other family members, e.g., ask your mom or dad why they named you what they did; or, How many cousins do you have? How many does your mom or dad have?

Other activities practice skills used during the school year. Examples of these include: What day is today? What date? What month? What year? What day was your birthday? Find the biggest book in the house, measure it, and tell what it is.

Each month there is at least one activity that requires more time and effort. The summer '88 calendar included making raisins, bricks, coffee-can ice cream, and a place mat.

These activities were culled from a variety of places and no specific source is recommended over another. Educational journals, craft books, *Sesame Street* magazines, and old curriculum materials all have yielded useful, enjoyable ideas. When the students return in the fall, many of them bring in their calendars for "show and tell." Parents frequently comment favorably on them during conferences, and anecdotes about one or more of the activities have led to more open and productive discussions.

Until this year, the calendars were created only for students with language deficiencies. They were so well received, however, when they were offered to all parents in the school last spring, that we went through three printings. Finally, the concept of summer calendars could be adapted to the curriculum of regular elementary and secondary classrooms. Creating them requires neither exhaustive research nor countless hours of a teacher's precious time. Calendars stressing science, social studies, art, or music could be developed to encourage parental participation in these areas.

AUGUST — **Speech Activities Calendar**

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 Make an August reading contract and check out some books at the library. Ask Dad or Mom if he or she had a favorite book at your age.	**2** Have someone put eight different things that smell in eight paper cups. Blindfolded, guess what each is.	**3** Make coffee-can ice cream with someone (see recipe on the back of this sheet).	**4** List or tell five things you can do that your grandparents could not.	**5** Make a poster illustrating one of the books you read in July.	**6** What day is it today? What date? What month? What year? What day was your birthday?
8 Make a plan to go to the zoo with your family. Who will go? When? Where will you eat?	**9** Send a friend a postcard from the zoo.	**10** Measure the biggest book in your house. What book is it? What is its size?	**11** What does "running for office" mean?	**12** How many spoons do you have in your house? Find an example of each of these: teaspoon, tablespoon, serving spoon, measuring spoon, cooking spoon.	**13** Arrange the spoons in order from smallest to largest, then from heaviest to lightest in weight.
15 Free choice day.	**16** Name all the TV programs you can think of in one minute. Name three you hate!	**17** Predict the weather for tomorrow to your family. How hot will it be? Will it rain?	**18** Was your weather forecast right?	**19** Empty all the wastebaskets in your house—how many did you empty?	**20** How many times can you hop on one foot without putting your other foot down?
22 How many cousins do you have? How many does your Mom or Dad have?	**23** If you could go anywhere, where would you go? Why? Ask Mom where she would choose.	**24** How many days until school starts? Name three ways to improve our school.	**25** Name five famous people you would not want to meet. Name five famous people you would like to meet.	**26** What happens when you mix ice cream, chocolate syrup, and milk together with a mixer? Try it!	**27** With a pen, draw the outline of an animal on a bar of soap. Then use a butter knife to carve out the animal.
29 Who are two people running for president? For vice president?	**30** How many books have you read this summer? Which one did you like best?	**31** Make a place mat. Use it at dinner.			

A Visionary View of Teacher-Parent Collaborations

by Brian Withers

"For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see, saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be . . ."

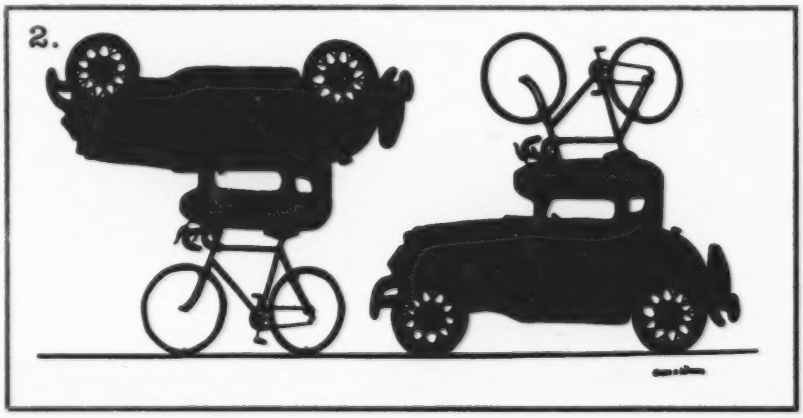
Alfred, Lord Tennyson

In a sense, when you focus on teacher-parent relationships, you aren't really focusing on parents or teachers. These relationships hinge almost entirely on the students themselves. Both teachers and parents want students to grow and become intelligent, responsible people.

Unfortunately, however, we live in a cynical age. All of us — parents, teachers, and students — are affected by this cynicism. Initially we must work to overcome a cynical perspective by taking a leap of faith. Parents and teachers should begin by believing in each other and in the educational process itself. *In our **first** illustration the moose has managed to catch the bicycle and balance it delicately on its antlers. This isn't easy, but a determined effort has won the day. In much the same way, we must believe in balancing and nurturing the needs of our students.* As one young mother with three school-age children said, "Science has its limits and can't always predict a child's future accurately. When people trust their hearts and not their heads, and when society learns that there is value in every life, then and only then will our society be truly civilized." And educated, I might add.

Once teachers and parents begin to believe in one another and in the process, they can view each situation in a candid, straightforward manner. Problems often need to be addressed with unique solutions. A few years ago at the high school in which I teach, before bilingual classes took hold, we had a major problem translating for our Spanish- and Italian-speaking students. Language teachers sent out letters in Spanish and Italian, asking parents to make themselves available as translators. Several parents responded and a network was set up. Eventually these same parents became tutors as well as translators. *In our **second** illustration, depicting a car carrying a bicycle and then a bicycle carrying a car, we find that a unique solution can be found for an insoluble problem.*

In a sense, parents and teachers should be seen as interchangeable in certain instances. Their functions can overlap in certain areas without any loss in prestige or effectiveness. The current homework policy at my school was arrived at by a committee of teachers, parents, and students. Together they worked out fair



policies for the frequency, checking, weight, and even the nature of homework. This policy is now included in the student handbook.

Today's educational process is filled with unexpected challenges, which give parents and teachers ample opportunity to work together. My school developed its own college office several years ago. However, students had little opportunity to meet with college representatives before deciding on a school. Parents and teachers solved this problem by devising a college night each fall. Parents sent out invitations to college representatives for an evening of convivial consultation as well as an attractive sit-down dinner. Students were encouraged to stay after school and set the tables. Faculty members greeted the representatives, students, and their families, making them feel welcome. Over time this college night, once an unexpected gleam in a guidance counselor's eye, became a well-attended night of dining and discussion.

Parents and teachers should expect the unexpected and take advantage of it. *Our **third** illustration shows a group of bikers riding on telephone lines in their neighborhood. At first this seems unexpected, until you realize that they'll never ever have to worry about having a car accident again.* This is not as implausible as it seems. We have sponsored several career nights at my school by simply having some of our teachers invite parents and members of the community to share their expertise and experience in their life's work. Politicians, firefighters, computer programmers, architects, construction workers, and teachers have gladly come forth to share their knowledge and background with our students. George Kalinsky, a professional sports photographer with many *Sports Illustrated* covers to his credit, entertained and informed our students with a slide presentation and a two-hour discussion of his work with well-known athletes.

How can parents and teachers work together in the future within the present educational framework? There are many answers, but a few are above all necessary for success. First of all, meet often. Get to know each other on a first-name basis. Consider each other's needs. Understand that today's parents are willing and eager to work with teachers to benefit schools and their students. But, and this is a major stumbling block, many households today have two working parents. So the time available for selling coffee and pretzels at football games, planning awards, coaching cheerleaders, and setting up career nights and tutorial programs is limited. Keep this in mind and work within the parents' schedules, and you will be successful. In the end, through open communication and courtesy, parents and teachers will be able to fly in the same direction with the same purpose in mind. *Our **fourth** illustration shows two birds on bicycles. In a world where birds can bicycle, why not expect parents and teachers to fly — in the same direction?* After all, their goal is the same — to achieve educational excellence for children.

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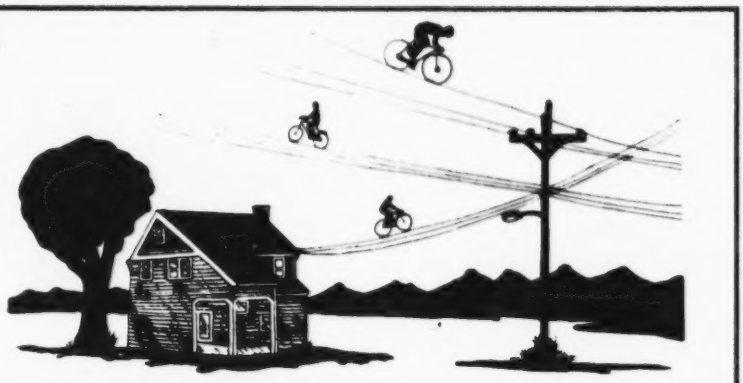

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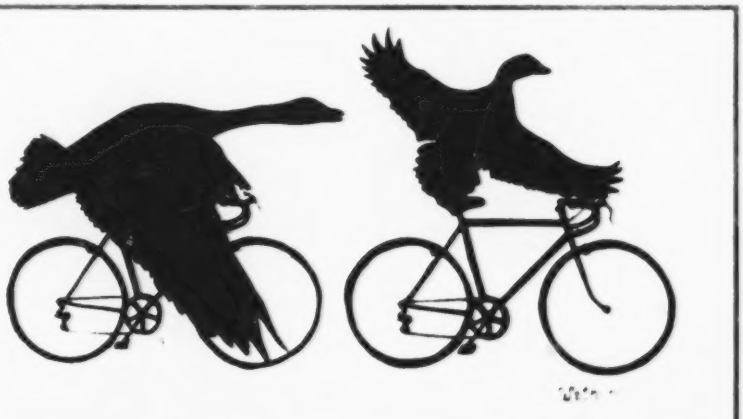

Contributing Teachers

Name	School Name	IMPACT II Site
Kate Arleen Bressler	Brooklyn West Regional Office	New York City (NY)
Sheila Clapkin	Calvert Street School	Los Angeles (CA)
Miriam K. Cohen	Public School 220Q	New York City (NY)
Jan Cox Corbett	Kings Park Elementary School	Fairfax County (VA)
Patricia A. Crowley	Redding Elementary School	San Francisco (CA)
Marilyn L. Dixon	Public School 36M	New York City (NY)
Mary Anne Drew	Hempstead School	Westchester/Rockland (NY)
Barbara Ann Carter Ellis	Public School 14R	New York City (NY)
Susan Feldman	Chapman School	Connecticut
Joel Howard Finkel	Public School 327K	New York City (NY)
Robyn Forman	Abraham Lincoln High School	New York City (NY)
Philip T. Freemer	King Philip Middle School	Connecticut
Timothy P. Gangwer	Kolter Elementary School	Houston (TX)
David Rudolph Georgi	Santa Maria High School	Santa Barbara County (CA)
Tim Hardin	Thomas Jefferson High School	Portland (OR)
Margo Harris	Estes Hill Elementary School	Chapel Hill (NC)
Paula Hartman	Child Service Center	Portland (OR)
Charlotte Higuchi	Farmdale Elementary School	Los Angeles (CA)
Deborah Hoadies	Thirty-Second Street U.S.C. Magnet School	Los Angeles (CA)
Carol P. Jacobs	Margetts Elementary School	Westchester/Rockland (NY)
Rochelle S. Kaplan	Eastern District High School	New York City (NY)
Violet Kary	Little Tor Elementary School	Westchester/Rockland (NY)
Sharon Garrity Larkin	Justin Dow Elementary Magnet School	Houston (TX)
Beth Larkins	Brooklyn Junior High School	Connecticut
Barbara Longmire	R. P. Harris Elementary School	Houston (TX)
Eileen Luckner	Community School District 24Q	New York City (NY)
Kerri A. Lyons	Kolter Elementary School	Houston (TX)
Barbara K. Mabry	Public School 335K	New York City (NY)
Judith Menken	East Harlem Block School	New York City (NY)
Jacqueline Meyer	Lyncourt School	Central New York Teaching Center (NY)
Shirley M. Myles	Bonner Elementary School	Houston (TX)
Paul James Nicolardi	William E. Grady Technical-Vocational High School	New York City (NY)
Bernadine C. Orintas	Region #16 Algonquin School	Connecticut
Kathryn Pepe	Solvay Elementary School	Central New York Teaching Center (NY)
Sharon M. Pike	Freedom Hill Elementary School	Fairfax County (VA)
Jeanne Poland	South Shore High School	New York City (NY)
Billie Preston	Thomas Middle School	Houston (TX)
Marie A. Prisco	Intermediate School 24R	New York City (NY)
Elizabeth Rainn	Dora B. Lantrip Elementary School	Houston (TX)
Rose C. Reissman	Writing Institute Community School District 2	New York City (NY)
Dorothy Ricci	Kay Avenue School	Connecticut
Darlissa Pivola-Ritter	Long Hill School	Connecticut
Lenore Roseman	Beach Channel High School	New York City (NY)
Robert Sarnoff	John Dewey High School	New York City (NY)
Steven Schneider	Public School 85X	New York City (NY)
Carol Simiele	Solvay Elementary School	Central New York Teaching Center (NY)
Beth Smuckler	Theodore Roosevelt High School	New York City (NY)
Marylin Kurlan Sperling	Public School 82Q	New York City (NY)
Donna Regina Strand	Public School 116M	New York City (NY)
Leslie J. Sussman	Public School 24Q	New York City (NY)
Doris E. Tariska	Second Hill Lane School	Connecticut
Mary Villani	Bronx High School of Science	New York City (NY)
Nina Wasserman	Public School 131K	New York City (NY)
Ann Wilbourn	Robert R. Rojas School	Socorro Independent School District (TX)
Dortha Cool Willetts	Thomas J. McDonough School	Connecticut
Brian Withers	John Adams High School	New York City (NY)

Teacher/Parent Partnerships Handbook Advisory Committee

William Cirone
Superintendent, Office of the County Superintendent of Schools, Santa Barbara

Ramon C. Cortines
Superintendent, San Francisco Unified School District

Sanford M. Dornbusch
Director, The Stanford Center for the Study of Families, Children and Youth, Stanford University

Barbara Ann Carter Ellis
Teacher, P.S. 14R, New York

Charlotte Frank
Vice President, McGraw-Hill Book Company

Mary Hatwood Futrell
President, National Education Association

Richard R. Johnson
Research Director, Exxon Education Foundation

Beth Larkins
Teacher, Brooklyn Junior High School, Connecticut

Donald St. John Parsons
Director, Teacher Practitioners Program, Bank Street College of Education

Albert Shanker
President, American Federation of Teachers

Joseph Shenker
President, Bank Street College of Education

Robert R. Spillane
Superintendent, Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia

For More IMPACT II Information

Adams County (CO)
Chris Sunberg
Adams County, District 12
11285 Highline Drive
Northglenn, CO 80233

Boston Public Schools (MA)
Barbara Locurto/Betty Ann Cabral
IMPACT II
26 Court Street
Boston, MA 02108

Central Michigan Consortium (MI)
John A. Frisch
Gratiot-Isabella Intermediate School
1131 East Center Street, Box 310
Ithaca, MI 48847

Central New York Teaching Center (NY)
Donna Morrison
Central New York Teaching Center
Room 112 Pickard Building
5858 East Molloy Road
Syracuse, NY 13211

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (NC)
Hazel Gibbs
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools
Merritt Mill Road
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Cherry Creek Schools (CO)
Joan B. Grady
Cherry Creek Schools
Eaglecrest School
5100 South Picadilly Road
Aurora, CO 80015

Clark County School District (NV)
Diane Reitz
Clark County School District
600 N. 9th Street
Las Vegas, NV 89101

Connecticut State Department of Education (CT)
Kathy DelMonico
Celebration of Excellence
205 Skiff Street
Hamden, CT 06157

Delaware County (PA)
Barbara S. Labowitz
IMPACT: Partners for Education
Delaware County Intermediate Unit
State Building/4th & Olive Streets
Media, PA 19063

District of Columbia Public Schools (DC)
Mary Johnson
Reed Learning Center
2200 Champlain Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

Fairfax County Public Schools (VA)
Elizabeth Coyne
IMPACT II
Fairfax County Public Schools
7423 Camp Alger Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22042

Houston Independent School District (TX)
Bonnie Adams
IMPACT II
3830 Richmond Avenue
Houston, TX 77027

Jackson Public Schools (MS)
Anne Gray
IMPACT II
Mississippi Effective Schools Consortium
4851 McWillie Circle
Jackson, MS 39206

Link — A Business and Education Partnership (WA)
Barbara Yates
LINK
P.O. Box 1086
Everett, WA 98206

Los Angeles Educational Partnership (CA)
Diane Glinos
Los Angeles Educational Partnership
315 West Ninth Street, Suite 1110
Los Angeles, CA 90015

Lowcountry Educators' Cooperative (SC)
Ann Birdseye
IMPACT II
Charleston County School District
Hutson and Meeting Streets
Charleston, SC 29403

Lubbock Independent School District (TX)
June Hogue
IMPACT TWO
1628 19th Street
Lubbock, TX 79401

New York City Public Schools (NY)
Margot Jones
IMPACT II
131 Livingston Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Northern New Jersey (NJ)
Joyce Kersey
A+ FOR KIDS Teacher Network
240 South Harrison Street
East Orange, NJ 07018

Portland Public Schools (OR)
Shirley Glick
IMPACT II
501 North Dixon Road
Portland, OR 97227

Roanoke Valley (VA)
Faye Pleasants
Roanoke City Public Schools
P.O. Box 13145
Roanoke, VA 24031

Rockland County (NY)
Diane Gess
IMPACT II
East Ramapo Central School District
105 So. Madison Avenue
Spring Valley, NY 10977

San Francisco Education Fund (CA)
Amy Cunninghis
San Francisco Education Fund
149 New Montgomery Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

San Juan Unified School District (CA)
Randi Butcher
IMPACT II
San Juan Unified School District
P.O. Box 477
3738 Walnut Avenue
Carmichael, CA 95609

Santa Barbara County Schools (CA)
Nancy Emerson
Santa Barbara County Schools
4400 Cathedral Oaks Road
Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6407

Socorro Independent School District (TX)
Ginny Kovacs
Socorro Independent School District
12300 East Lake Drive
El Paso, TX 79927

Westchester County (NY)
Laura Lipton
Board of Cooperative Educational Services
Concord Road
Ardsley, NY 10502

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